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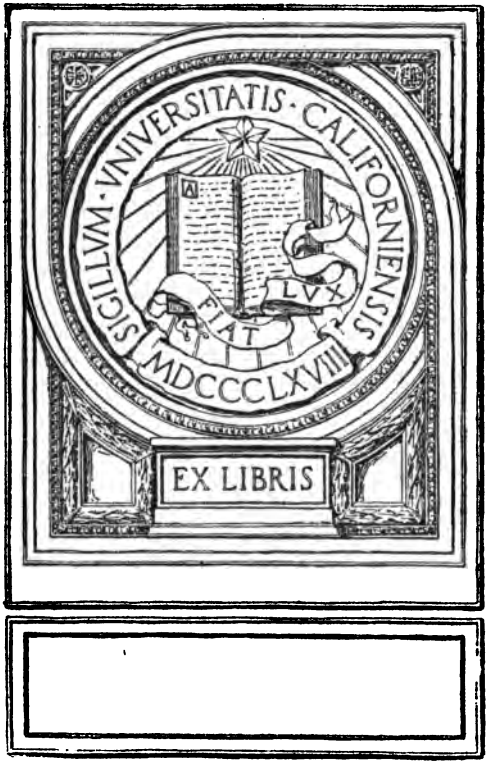
THE SQUIREEN

BY

SHAN·F·BULLOCK

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THE SQUIREEN

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE AWKWARD SQUADS

BY THRASNA RIVER

RING O' RUSHES

THE CHARMER

THE BARRYS

IRISH PASTORALS

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THE SQUIREEN

BY

SHAN F. BULLOCK

Univ. of California

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THE SQUIREEN

CHAPTER I

IF you climb Rhamus Hill, mount the castle wall and set your face towards the setting sun, on your right will be Emo and the long glitter of Lough Erne, behind will lie Thrasna river and the wilderness of Bilboa; on your left Lackan lough will gleam darkly among the hills, Armoy and its boglands stretch away towards my Lord the mountain, and the pastures of Gorteen spread out below your feet even unto the distant whiteness of the Ferry road and the rude borders of Drumhill townland.

Should the day be cloudy and in summer-time, the wind south-west and moist, the sky high and grey, your eyes will have happy sight of a characteristic Ulster prospect. The scene will be fair, wide-spreading and varied, at once heartsome and subdued: mountains blue and

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misty, valleys long and shallow, hills low, rounded, and cut fantastically by ditch and hedgerow into little fields, the great tracts of bogland lying flat and sullen beneath the sun. Trees will abound, white cottages peep forth here and there, roads and lanes crawl in and out. You will have the flash of water, the gloom of heather, the quick vividness of lush meadow-land and wide-spreading pasture. There will be cattle upon the hills, men and women in the valleys, a fisher lonely upon the lake, a clanking cart upon the road. Shadows will flit along the mountain and trip across the hedges. Bilboa will be clothed in the sombreness of rush and whin. Far back the roofs of Bunn will gleam and darken. By Thrasna river the valley will be one medley of trees, hedges, haycocks, green cropland and brown heather-patches, a hand's-width of river and a gleam of whitewash. Out below the horizon my Lord will drowse in the dimness and the Lake wind lazily for the sea. A great peace will fill the land, a softness as of sleep; you will dream and brood and admire; at last find the hedges running together, the hills crowding their crests, and the scene come narrowing in,

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till of all the broad countryside but the land of Gorteen, lying there before you, has room in your eyes.

Now Bilboa, Armoy, and Drumhill are big and bare, and these regions are Catholic; but Gorteen is small and fruitful, and this is Protestant. In many ways, Gorteen—that land of wisdom—differs wholly from its neighbours, and with them has no sympathy. Enter its confines, by way of these, where and when you will, and at once you have signs of change. You seem to have stepped into a new country. Hedges become trim, lanes and fields orderly, houses neat, offices clean, crops flourishing. You have gardens and lawns, flowers in the windows and curtains behind them, knockers upon the painted doors and steps before them. In the fields are ploughs and harrows, mowing-machines upon the meadows, flocks and herds amid the pastures. Orchards stand everywhere, with beehives ranged in the shade and linen bleaching in the sun. You meet fewer stragglers and no beggar-men. Pigs keep their styes; goats and donkeys are missed from the wayside. The carts are painted, the cars clean and jaunty. An air of prosperity is

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abroad, of industry and rude comfort, of independence also and a more rigid rule of life. The country seems blessed of God, slavery and terror banished from its confines. Even the hills look free; you stand and gaze within the borders of a new country; nor can you fail to see that you are in the midst of a new race. Altogether different are these good folk—these men you meet, these women you see—from the unfortunates who dwell without. They are better clothed and better fed, bolder of eye and bearing; bigger, harder, coarser, tighter of lip, stronger in hand and body; more prosaic also, narrower in mind, and less variously gifted. The men are sturdy, stern and broad of feature; the women big in the bone, and not renowned for comeliness. Ordinarily they wear tweeds and leggings, linsey bodices and quilted petticoats; on Sundays you find them stepping to church or preaching in stuffs and broadcloths. They eat plentifully of eggs and bacon, tea and stirabout, potatoes, butter and white bread. Among them drunkenness is uncommon, immorality ill-known. As hagglers in fair or market, poachers and litigants, their fame is great.

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They speak a slow and oily dialect, part Irish and part Scotch; have some gifts of humour and a talent for religion and politics. Sons of freedom, they call themselves, stern upholders of Protestantism and sworn foes of Pope and Popery. In every garden Orange lilies flourish; a Bible lies on every parlour table. For Queen and Country, Self and pelf, God and the Church: these are watchwords in Gorteen. Also they are hospitable there, kind and warm-hearted: and a more strenuous race does not cumber the earth. Descendants they are, and not far removed, of Puritan and Covenanter: a hardy, dogmatic, prideful stock.

If you enter Gorteen by way of the Bunn road, you come soon to Lackan bridge and, just beyond it, strike a narrow roadway which runs obliquely uphill away from Armoy. Following this you pass the old Chapel gates (the Chapel itself is gone now, thatch and all), have sight as you go of a few homesteads, and a glimpse across the bog of the wilds of Drumhill; then dip into a hollow, bend sharply round past a wayside drinking-pool, and find yourself, all suddenly, looking down a slope straight into the heart of Gorteen. And just

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at your elbow, on the right as you stand, a gap in the hedge makes room for the gate-posts and avenue of Hillside House.

The gateposts are battered now, the gate rotted and gone. Weeds infest the avenue, the hedges stand gaunt and wild, only stumps remain of the stately firs that once moaned in the winds; the fields on either hand are rush-grown, the garden a tangle, the orchard a wilderness. The offices are dilapidated, thistles flourish in the haggard, grass covers the yard. In the stable where once stood Martin's hunter pigs wallow and grow fat, fowls roost in the empty barn; and now in all the rooms and passages of Hillside—once so cleanly and garnished, in the days whilst Martin's mother ruled there—tattered barbarians do riot. The windows are broken, doors battered, walls and roof cracked and moss-grown; the steps by the hall door are gone, the flower-beds before it and the creeper on the walls and the painted fence that bordered the lawn, all are vanished with the years. Ruin and desolation have made Hillside their own, and of its former glory remains now but traditions and memories. So do men wither

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from the earth and their fair works decay, leaving ruin and tombstones to mark their place.

One March evening, in the old days of prosperity, a man sat by a table in the little parlour that faced Hillside lawn. The blind was drawn, a peat fire burned softly in the grate, candles stood on the table and dimly lighted the room. There was a carpet on the floor, with sheep-skins and mats among the haircloth chairs; old-fashioned ornaments in glass and earthenware stood upon the mantel; ancient sporting-prints in heavy walnut frames hung upon the walls; in the corners were whips, sticks, guns, fishing-rods, a small safe, a cupboard of old china, a case of books—tattered novels, a dictionary, a peerage list, treatises on horses, dogs, and farm management. The ceiling was low and smoked. A faded paper covered the walls. On the table lay a newspaper, a pair of spurs, account-books, a file of bills, and an open ledger.

It was over the ledger that the man sat, shoulders bent and elbows squared. Before him stood an empty tumbler; his lips drew at a dead pipe; his brow was knitted, his face

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flushed. At times he shifted his feet noisily, or flung back in his chair and sat staring at the fire; again, as his eyes roved the ledger or fell upon the total of a bill, he muttered sullenly or swore aloud. At last with a bang he closed the ledger, leant towards a candle, and relit his pipe; then rose, and crossing to the hearth stood straddled on a sheepskin with his back to the fire. And as he stood he blew clouds of smoke at the ceiling, and smiled sardonically at thought. 'Ay,' said he at times; 'ay, indeed. A pretty pickle, sure enough— Oh, you're in for it, Martin, my boy,' said he in a while; then clasped hands behind him, and went striding the room.

A tall man, of some thirty-five years, was Martin Hynes—this owner of Hillside and the debts thereof—with an upright figure, strong neck, fine shoulders and masterful hands. His face was large and square, features strong, eyes deep-set and bold, chin full, ears large, complexion tanned and clear. His waving black hair was streaked with grey, his moustache was long and curled. He wore coarse tweeds, leggings, and heavy boots; in his scarf was a horse-shoe pin, from his watch-

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chain hung a heavy gold seal. A big handsome man he was, healthy and powerful.

Far back in the dim years, Martin's forebears had been planters, pioneers, fighters. One grandfather had been a schoolmaster, the other a land-steward; one grandmother had been Scotch, the other English; his father had been a bailiff, had acquired Hillside and died a magistrate; his mother was Irish-born of English parents and had spent her earlier years in the service of Lord Louth. In the man Hynes, therefore, was a confusion of strains. Part of him was Scotch, part English; the rest and most of him Ulster must claim as her own. His kind was scarce in the North, unique in Gorteen. He had the look somewhat of a country gentleman, somewhat of a sporting farmer. Locally he was known as the Squire; really he was an Ulster form of Squireen. He owned a personality, a temperament. There was some good in him, and some bad; a great deal that was neutral and ran, as circumstances demanded, to this side or that of his character. As a friend he was faithful, as an enemy unscrupulous. He could bluster, or fight; bully, or persuade. No man

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might better him at a bargain. He was fond of pleasure and the sweets of laziness, was good-humoured and good-hearted when he chose, now hard as a stone and now tender as a child. Men stared at him in fairs; women worshipped him. Far and wide he was known; in Gorteen he was something of a figure, admired as a man and a sportsman, respected for his own sake and the sake of his parents. Sometimes in passing him, high up in the world on gig or hunter, a peasant would pull at his forelock, or a woman curtsy in the dust. At Church he paraded himself. When he rode to hounds, or assisted at local functions, no aristocrat there lorded it over the Squire. A few laughed at him; wiseacres at sight of his extravagances looked towards the future and shook their heads: the many just took him as he appeared, and at his own valuing. Since his father's death, some years before, he had ruled in Hillside, living there with his old mother and a couple of servants, enjoying life and wasting his patrimony, slipping on towards the inevitable day of reckoning, not thinking and not much caring. But he was thinking now; maybe was beginning to care.

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Up and down the room he went, hands clasped and head bowed; presently stayed by the fire again, and fell to communing with himself.

'No,' said he, as if to his inner man; 'it's no good. There's no way out of it. I'm snared, I'm snared. Fool? I'm an almighty fool! Think of where I am, with only Jane Fallon between me an'—' He flung back his head and laughed mirthlessly. 'Jane Fallon,' he said, his lip curling; 'only Jane Fallon!' Again he laughed; then stood pondering a while. 'But what else can I do?' he went on, spreading a hand to himself. 'In God's name, what else can I do? I must have money or—or—' He paused. 'Or lose all —lose all.' Again he paused; then broke out aloud: 'I'll not lose it. I'll sell my soul first! It's mine yet, every sod and stick of it: an' mine it'll be to the last. . . .' He paused once more, turning swiftly towards the door. 'Whisht!' he said softly. 'She mustn't know. It would kill her. Poor old mother!' Crossing to the door he tried its handle; fell again to his pacing; stopped, and facing the window, spoke as to some one beyond it. 'It's no use,

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Kate,' said he in a mournful whisper; 'it's no use, girl. I can't help it. I'm down. You'd wait, I know—but I want money. It's not you I want now—it's money, money. I'm sellin' you an' sellin' myself. This very night I'm goin' to do it. To-morrow you'll know; an' I'll see you no more. See you no more . . . see you no more . . . see you no more.'

Over and over he repeated the phrase; then, mastered by sudden impulse, turned quickly and pulled out his watch. 'I will see you!' he cried, his face kindling. 'It's your due, an' I will see you. Let them wait.' Hurriedly he took up the ledger, the account-books and bills, and locked them in the safe; then blew out the candles, and made for the door.

Taking hat and staff from a rack in the hall, he opened an inner door and entered the kitchen. There it was all light and comfort, a big fire blazing, the tins shining on the walls and the crockery on the dresser, the tiled floor swept, tables and chairs scrubbed white, ceiling heavy with hams and dried fish, shelves laden with canisters and medicine-bottles. A dog lay stretched upon the hearth, a cat curled

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upon the flour-box. In a corner George the servant-boy sat smoking and greasing his boots; at a table Mary the maid was busy ironing. Hearing Martin's foot the dog rose and came to heel, and the servants looked round; but without heeding, Martin crossed towards the yard, turned through a narrow doorway, and closed the door behind him.

He was now in a little room that looked upon the yard. There were shelves at one end carrying milk-crocks and delf, loaves and grocery, saucepans and tins. A set of harness hung on the wall, and a new saddle and bridle. A table, spread with a clean cloth, stood by the window; near the door a small fire burnt, and before it in a wicker chair Martin's mother sat knitting. A shawl was round her shoulders; she wore a black dress, a lace cap, and felt slippers. She was tall and thin, old and wrinkled, with white hair, placid features, delicate hands. A distinguished old lady she looked, dignified and serene, her mouth firm, chin strong, the lines of experience and patience clear on her face. As Martin entered she looked up, smiled, and went on knitting.

'Well, mother.' Martin took his place

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before her, elbow on the mantel-shelf and feet crossed. 'Still busy?'

'Yes, Martin.' She turned her needles and started a new row; then glanced over her spectacles at Martin's hat and staff. 'You're going out?'

'I am.' Martin stood upright, fumbled with his hat and dropped the end of his staff sharply upon the tiles. 'I'm goin' across the fields for an hour or so; I'll be back—I'll not be long.' His mother smiled and nodded; she was used to his going across the fields. He crossed to a shelf and drank deeply from a bowl of milk; came back and stood by the door. He had a doubtful look, an air of constraint; seemed almost possessed of shame. 'You'll not be sittin' up?' he said. 'There's no need.'

'Oh no, Martin.' She knitted a few stitches, her needles clicking through the silence. 'You'll be wanting supper, I suppose?'

'To be sure—to be sure I will. Why, I'll only be a while; just across the fields I'm goin' for an hour or so.' Martin paused, turned to the door, and opened it a little. 'Well, good night, in case I don't see you

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again.' He closed the door, came back, and stood by her chair. 'There's nothing the matter, mother?' he asked. 'Is there, now?'

'The matter?' His mother looked up, searching his face with steady eyes. 'Why, what could be the matter?' she asked, her placid old voice just ruffled with surprise.

Martin looked at the fire. 'Ah, I thought maybe there was,' he said. 'You seemed hardly yourself, somehow.' He backed towards the door, but his mother stretched a hand and laid it on his arm.

'Martin,' she said, her eyes steady on his face, 'are you sure it is not yourself? Tell me, my son.'

'What, mother?'

'What's the matter with *you*, Martin?' Her voice was low, but big with meaning. 'Tell me, my son.'

'With me?' He laughed uneasily, his face flushing deep. 'Me? Well, that's a question! Why, I never was better in my life. Look at me,' he said, drawing himself to full stature, and flinging back his shoulders. 'Look at me.'

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But his mother shook her head. 'It's not that, Martin.' She touched her forehead. 'It's here,' she went on. 'Tell me, is there anything on your mind?'

He dropped his eyes; appeared to consider a moment; looked up again. 'No, mother; there's nothing.'

'You're sure—quite sure?'

'Certain sure.'

'And I can't help you at all?'

Martin stood considering, seriously now and swiftly. Should he tell her everything; confide in her and ask counsel? She was wise; she might understand and forgive, might help and advise. She had a little money in her own right; she must have some suspicion of the condition of things: maybe after all it were wiser—? No. She would not understand, could never forgive. He looked her in the face. 'No, mother; there's nothing to help.'

'You're sure, Martin—quite sure?'

'Certain sure.'

'Ah, well!' She turned away, sighed, and took up her knitting. 'Ah, well!' she sighed.

Martin turned for the door, came back, bent

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low and took her hand. 'See here, mother,' he said; 'you mustn't be worrying like this. I say you mustn't. Woman dear, have wit! Why, I 'd tell you—you know I 'd tell you —if anything was wrong. Now, see here, just put away that knitting, an' get a book, an' go soon to your bed. You will, now? You 'll promise me?'

'Yes, Martin.' She folded her knitting and fixed the ball of wool upon the needles. 'Yes, Martin,' she said again; then took off her spectacles and put them in the case.

'That's right. Good night to you, mother.'

'Good night, Martin.'

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CHAPTER II

HAVING bid his mother good night, Martin went out through the kitchen doorway, across the yard and down the avenue; at Hillside gate turned up towards Armoy, went past the Chapel, and along a lane that issued soon upon the Bunn road; there turned again and went straight for the wilds of Drumhill.

The night was dark and dull. Great clouds hung low over the sleeping fields. Here and there the hills loomed dimly and the valleys lay silent. The peace of darkness was upon the earth, with only a dog breaking it, or the roll of a distant drum, or the voice of the wind, or the quick fall of Martin's feet upon the road. The early hour notwithstanding, no one seemed abroad. A light burned in Ned Noble's cottage, a window in the Priest's house cast a glimmer among the firs, out upon the hills other lights shone feebly; but for this

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or that Martin had no heed, nor for aught save the wide road before him. With bowed head he went striding along, walking gloomily with thought. His mind was troubled, conscience awake; even his nerves were uneasy. He banged his staff upon the road, kept muttering to himself; saw his mother's face at his feet, heard her voice in the darkness. He knew that she knew; told himself that he had done ill. Had he confided in her all might have been well; the clouds might have lightened, and he might even then be walking gaily, with no shade of indignity before him, and no dogs of regret at his heels. But he had not told her; therefore was he walking gloomily, cursed with thought. If only he had been wise; if only he could see a way; if only— Ah, why trouble? The thing was done. Maybe he had done ill; perhaps, after all, he had done well: anyhow, let come what might and let worrying go to the winds. Nothing mattered, nothing now.

Quickening his stride, therefore, and bidding thought defiance with an empty sound of whistling, Martin swung his staff and hurried along; went down the Priest's brae, on past

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the drear waste of bogland and the flats of Leemore, then uphill again, and coming to the schoolhouse which stands within sight of Drumhill cross-roads, turned through the gateway and along the pathway which ends at the pillars of the school porch.

On either hand large square windows looked upon the road, and these were dark; but right between the pillars was a smaller window, and this showed bright with a shadow flung upon it through a narrow buff blind. Treading softly, Martin mounted the porch step, listened a minute beside the window; then tapped upon the glass, whistled twice, and seeing the shadow move, turned to the left and waited at the school door—waited till footsteps sounded within, a bolt shot back, the door opened, and the figure of a woman carrying a lighted candle stood before him.

'Well, Kate?'

'Ah, Martin, it 's you.'

And with that Martin stepped from the porch, took the woman in his arms, and kissed her.

The two stood a minute by the door; then Martin closed it and following Kate across the

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schoolroom sat down beside her within the rostrum. A narrow place it was, dingy and worn, with a sloping desk in front and the wall behind; but wide and good enough for any pair of lovers. Kate sat on the right, Martin on the left, between and fronting them stood the candle, flickering in the gloom, working strange freaks of light and shade upon their faces, flinging their shadows big upon the wall, creating night and day among the pictured continents of the maps, making monsters of the animals that hung silent above the fireplace, leaving the high ceiling and the tiled floor and the deep rows of empty desks to brood uncannily, like mere ghosts of themselves, out in the gloom. But upon the rostrum all was brightness, even upon the inkstains there, and the pens and pencils that lay strewn, and Martin's hat, and Kate's folded hands. Just bent a little forward she sat, her arms resting upon the desk, head turned towards Martin, and her eyes upon his face. A small, firmly-knit woman she was, of some thirty years, with dark hair and a trusting face. Her brow was wide and high, her eyes kindly and wise; she looked worn a little and faded, and her mouth

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kept those lines of repression which come surely to all giving patient years in the service of youth.

They spoke together of certain personal matters, not eagerly, but in the sober fashion becoming folk no longer young; gave a thought to Martin's mother and one to Kate's, spoke of the school and its doings, of Hillside and its affairs, exchanged a word of comment or news regarding their friends and neighbours; then fell silent for a while, then looked at each other, then sat studying the candle in search of a word. Kate seemed thoughtful, Martin embarrassed. A shadow of constraint lay between them. Kate fell to toying with a pen, Martin sat fumbling his hat-brim; at last, the word being yet tardy, and the silence growing painful, Kate laughed softly and turned.

'Well, we're a pretty pair,' said she, in that full clear voice of hers; 'sitting here like children in disgrace. Why, we couldn't have less to say if we were married.'

Martin laughed noisily. 'Ay,' said he; 'faith, you're right, Kate. Like the man in the story, we're grand hands at holdin' our tongues.' He bent over the desk and cocked his head. 'Well, I'm listenin'.'

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'Are you, now? An' sure so am I.'

They leant together for a minute, each waiting for the other; then of a sudden Martin set his back against the wall, thrust hands in pockets and sighed. 'Ah,' said he, 'I 'm in no humour for sport—none at all. I dunno, in Heaven's name, what 's come to me. Somehow I 'm fair miserable.'

Kate turned; shaded her eyes with a hand, and sat looking at Martin's face. 'Are you, Martin?' she said.

'I am. All the evenin' I 've been like this.' His brow had fallen; he pushed out his chin, and frowned at the candle. 'Ah, I wish to glory this evenin' was over.'

'Do you, Martin?' Kate turned a little more, and bent a hand around her eyes. 'Do you, Martin?' she said.

'Yes, I do. It 's the worst evenin' I ever had.' Martin paused. 'God only knows what 's comin' of it.'

Kate kept silence. She knew Martin and his humours. Long years of experience had taught her when to speak and when to wait. Something was coming, she knew; something ominous that even in coming chilled her heart.

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Only once before, in all the years of their friendship, had she seen Martin in like humour; and then trouble had come. Trouble was coming that night; she knew it, divined it, had expected it maybe in her heart. For people had hinted of late, and rumour cackled; neither had she ever been quite certain. Who was she that Martin should care for her? what was she to requite his favour? Only a poor body of a schoolmistress she was: whilst he—he was Martin. Ah, surely trouble was coming. Only she must be patient, and brave as she might.

'I oughtn't to have come to see you at all,' Martin went on, in a while. 'I wasn't comin', only somethin' made me. I meant to get it over first; but I couldn't, somehow. 'Twas your due. . . . I had to come.'

Something coming? Why, it was already here! Kate turned towards the candle again. 'Yes, Martin,' said she.

''Twas your due, an' I had to come.' Suddenly Martin jerked forward and clutched Kate's arm. 'Look here, Kate,' said he, 'I can't help it, an' you'll have to forgive me. I'm bewildered. I'm beset on all sides. I'm head over ears in debt. There's a mortgage

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on the land. I must have money. God knows, I 've been to blame. There 's no foolishness I haven't done. An' now I 'm payin' for it; ay, payin' deep an' heavy. . . . But no matter about me. Devil serve me right! It 's you, Kate; it 's you. Ah, I 'm a blackguard!' He sank back against the wall. 'There 's bad in me—black bad.'

Still Kate kept silence. It had come, she felt; come surely. Leaning her elbows upon the desk, she rested face in hands, and so sat looking blankly out into the gloom.

'There 's black bad in me.' Martin growled out the words; then sprang to his feet and began pacing before the rostrum, hands in pockets and his eyes down. 'But what could I do?' he asked, not for the only time that evening. 'I 'm tied hand an' foot. Every way I 've looked, an' there 's only one chance for me. I must have money. They 're shoutin' for it, the whole pack. Ah, the devil have them! . . . There 's that Jew of a Hicks that swears he 'll sell me out. There 's that reptile of a huckster below in Derryvad theatenin' the law. Here 's Smith of Bunn that we 've dealt with for years, sendin' me a lawyer's letter.

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May sorrow have him!' cried Martin; and passed from creditor to creditor, cursing and vilifying as he went. All of them he named, and the amounts he owed them, and the penalties they threatened; then stopped before the rostrum, looked at Kate across the candle and stretched an arm. 'There now,' said he, his voice loud, his tone that of one whose offences are triumphantly justified by the greatness of his affliction; 'there's where I am, an' there's the kind I've got to deal with! Mercy? They've none! Friendship? They'd cut me throat! They'd ruin me without winkin'; they'd be glad if they saw Hillside in the courts to-morrow, an' myself in the street. . . . But they'll not! I'll be quits wi' them yet—the thievin' pack o' sweeps! Ah, if I only had them under my feet,' shouted Martin, and stamped on the floor; 'I'd grind them to powder!' He fell to pacing the tiles again. 'An' I will,' he said: 'be the Lord, I will!'

Kate had been listening quietly, hearing Martin and understanding him; yet waiting patiently for the real thing he had yet to say. All this saying was strange enough in its way, and revealed worse than she had ever sus-

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pected; but most of it was only talk, the rest mere excuse; and much as she pitied Martin and sympathised with him, yet was she human enough to pity her lingering self still more. Therefore, as Martin fell to his manly pacing again, she leant back, folded her hands and spoke. 'And what are you going to do?' she said.

Martin halted. 'Do?' he repeated. 'What am I goin' to do?' He walked a step; stopped and faced round. 'I 'm goin' to get money,' he said, with the abruptness of one coming to the test.

'I know.' Kate's voice was quiet, but clear and steady. 'And how are you going to get it?'

'I 'm— I 'm—' Martin hesitated; looked away; charged at the words. 'I 'm goin' to marry it.'

'Ah!' Kate shivered a little; looked down. 'I—I expected that,' she went on, her voice, in spite of herself, changed greatly. 'I knew it was that.' She paused, with the candlelight flickering on her face and Martin's eyes hard upon it. 'An' who might it be?' she asked at last.

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A moment of dead silence came. Kate sat quiet, hands folded and her face lowered, the candlelight glancing in her hair. She was pale and her lips were drawn; but Martin, towering above her in his strength and manhood, had sight only of her placid brow. He looked at her a while, then with the blind rush of one facing the inevitable, made hurried answer. 'It's Jane Fallon,' he said, the words coming defiantly, as in the very face of shame.

'Jane Fallon?' Slowly Kate repeated the name, divulging it, you might think, to her wondering self. 'Jane Fallon! . . . I know. Ah, poor Jane,' she went on; then looked up swiftly, a smile creeping on her face. 'So that's your choice?'

Martin fell back a step. 'That's it,' he said.

'And it's all settled, I suppose?'

'It'll soon be. I'm goin' to settle all to-night. They're waitin' for me now.' Martin looked at his watch. 'Yes; they're waitin' for me now.'

'And you called to tell me on your way?' Kate's voice was edged with scorn.

'I did. I had to. I thought it no more than your due.'

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'I 'm thankful to you.' Kate rose and took up the candle. 'I 'm very thankful to you,' she said, stepping from the rostrum towards the door; 'and I 'll not be keeping you.'

But Martin took her by an arm. 'Wait, Kate. Listen to me, now. Woman dear, don't be goin' like that.'

'There 's nothing to wait for. I 'm only keeping you.' Kate made as if to go. 'I 've work to do.'

'Ah, but Kate!' Martin's voice came soft and pleading. 'One word, now. God knows, I 'm ashamed of myself. Listen to me. As God 's my judge, I 'd marry you to-morrow if I could only see my way. But——'

'Ah, quit, quit!' Kate stamped her foot and pulled away. 'Let me go, I say!'

'No. No. Listen to me. You must hear me. It 's God's truth I 'm sayin', Kate. You 're the only woman I ever cared a straw for. I like you now better than ever. If I was only free, I tell you I 'd marry——'

'Ah, quit, quit!'

'I tell you I would. I swear to you I would. But how can I? See the plight I 'm in. What could I do for you? What could

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you do for me, or with me?' Martin was facing Kate now, a hand on each shoulder, the candle burning between them. 'You'd never have a minute's peace. I'd worry the life in you. You'd come to rue the day you ever saw me. Ah, I know it. You're better as you are, Kate; far better. Ah, I'm—I'm—' Martin's voice grew hard, his face darkened. 'Ah, what about me? What am I but a fool? What matters it to any one how soon the divil has me?'

Kate looked up. 'But you'd marry Jane Fallon?'

Martin nodded. 'Ay,' he said with a laugh. 'I'd marry Jane.'

'An' she doesn't care?'

'I dunno. Maybe she does; most likely she doesn't.'

'An' you don't care?'

'Not a straw. . . . But she has money.'

Kate stood looking at the candle. 'Money?' she said. 'Money! Ah, poor Jane!'

'Ay, poor Jane. Dear knows, I pity her.' Martin stood silent for a breath. 'But why should I pity her? Sure she'll be well enough. Won't she be the envy of half the

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countryside?' He flung back his head and laughed—a hollow noise of mirth. 'Dear Heavens, to think of it! Jane Fallon—Jane Fallon!'

Then Kate looked up again. 'Are you done with me?' she asked. 'It 's getting late. I 've work to do; and I 'm only keeping you.'

'Then keep me,' said Martin. 'Let them wait.' He pressed his hands—his masterful hands—upon Kate's shoulders and gently swayed her to and fro. 'Kate,' he said, 'look at me. It 's the last time.' His voice was soft as milk. 'Dear knows, I never thought it was goin' to end like this. Look at me, Kate.'

'Ah, quit. For God's sake, quit an' go!'

'Ah, but, Kate. Listen to me, woman. Only this word. Tell me, d' you forgive me?'

Kate was trembling and full of tears. 'Ah, quit,' she cried again. 'For God's sake, go!'

'Ah, but, Kate. Sure you 'll tell me that. . . . Then listen, woman. D' you understand me?' Still Martin's voice was suave and pleading; still he kept pressing upon Kate's shoulders and swaying her to and fro. 'Listen to me,' he repeated. 'D' you understand me?'

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And with that Kate stepped back from his hands and faced him boldly.

'Understand you?' she said, clearly and steadily, her eyes bright and scornful. 'I understand you as if I read your heart. I know you now to the very depths. Go,' she cried, pointing to the door; 'go to your Jane an' her money. D' you think I care? D' you think I want you? Who am I to keep you a minute? What's my forgiveness to you? No,' cried Kate, and stepped quickly from Martin's hands; 'don't lay another finger on me. I'm quit of you, an' I scorn the sight of you.' She turned for the door, going swiftly with the candle flaring before her and Martin hurrying behind.

'Kate. Listen to me, now. Just a word, Kate. For God's sake, listen to me. . . .'

Kate opened the door; stood back by the wall and waited silently.

'But, Kate. Just a word.'

There was no answer.

Martin turned in the doorway. 'So you won't listen to me, an' won't answer. This is how you let me go!' He crossed the threshold with a laugh. 'Very well, then. Just as you please. Good night to you.'

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The door closed; the bolts went back; swiftly Kate crossed to the rostrum, blew out the candle, and sinking upon the seat flung her arms across the desk, laid her face upon them and sobbed. 'Ah,' she cried, 'God help me! God help me!'

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CHAPTER III

MARTIN went down the path, and pulled the gate behind him; turned to the right, mounted the ditch, and stood looking across the hedge towards the school. Through the great square window he saw the light dwindle, then remain steady for an instant, then vanish suddenly into darkness. 'She's in the passage,' said he, and turning his eyes upon the little window waited for Kate's shadow to appear upon the narrow buff blind.

But no shadow came; still did the light burn beyond the pillars and the windows on either side keep black; so Martin stepped back upon the road and faced downhill towards home. 'She's gone to the kitchen,' said he; 'gone to tell the mother. Lord, the talk there'll be!' He laughed and quickened his stride. 'Poor Kate,' he said; 'she took it ill. Never did I see her in such a way. Her eyes were like hot coals; I thought she'd hit me. . . . Poor

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Kate! Dear knows, I pity her. But it had to be; and surely she paid me back. Well, maybe it 's for the best. Anyway, it 's over at last; all over and done. . . . An' now for business.'

Right at foot of the Priest's brae, Martin left the broad road and turned straight into Gorteen along a narrow track. Soft and rough underfoot it was now, with deep ruts marking the way and stunted hedges on either hand; soon the fields fell behind and the sheltering hills, hedges dwindled into willow clumps, ditches ran into turf banks, and the track ran nakedly through wastes of dreary bogland. Dreary indeed it was out there, and black as death. No light shone upon it; no sound, save the distant murmur of an outer world and the rude bluster of driving wind, broke its stillness. Above the sky hung dour; below the earth lay grim, barren and unpopulous, cold and sodden, a great wilderness lying flat within the circling hills. Nothing moved there, nor thing nor shadow, and the wind swept it from edge to edge with a wailing hiss among the heather and a moan around the looming peat-clumps. Right across it,

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from highway unto highway, like some passage of the dead leading from life to life, stretched the weary track, wide drains on either hand and sullen bogholes among the heather, the edges of it broken and treacherous, its face trampled deep with wheel and hoof. In broad day you being a stranger trod warily, at night went groping from plight to plight, cowering in the silence, keeping watch on your very life. But for your hill-born native, darkness has no mystery, wild places no terror; and even so it was with Martin Hynes that night, going lonely on his way. He feared nothing. The ills and delights of imagination seldom troubled him. Had some form sprung quick from the gloom before him he would have gripped his staff and gone boldly on. For him the bog was only a place of turf banks, the track across it no more than a short cut from road to road; therefore, swinging his staff, cursing the wind and thinking betimes of what lay before him, sturdily he plodded along; on till the fields and hedges were with him again, and his feet safe on the firm high-road.

He was now in the heart of Gorteen, about two furlongs distant from Hillside gates upon

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the Chapel road; thence, bearing quick to the left, he skirted the bog, passed the Lough-head, and just beyond the turning that makes for Derryvad shore, came to a house that stood back from the roadway in the shadow of poplars.

Seen by daylight, the house was long, low, and whitewashed, with a green doorway, brass knob and knocker (signmarks of respectability, these, in Gorteen), white window-sashes, green sill-boxes, and sandstone step; house-leek upon the eaves, rose-trees on the wall, two short chimney-stacks peeping above the thatch. At the back was a yard and outhouses; beyond the poplars lay a haggard and kitchen garden; in the front were flower-beds with a box-edged path leading between them out to the trim whitethorn hedge and painted wicket. Everything was clean there, tidy and decent. Respectability stared at you through the curtained window-panes, prosperity clothed the surrounding fields.

In summer-time orange lilies flared Protestant defiance upon any tattered children of the hills who turned to fling a curse across the hedge; of winter evenings drum and fife

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vented loyal discords from the garden in despite of Pope and Popery. Next to Hillside itself this was perhaps the snuggest homestead in Gorteen; and here dwelt pridefully that man of means and wisdom, Red Hugh Fallon.

Passing through the gateway and along the path, Martin knocked loudly; then stepped back and, with his eyes fast upon the lighted parlour window, stood beating a leg with his staff. At once a door slammed within, a sound of voices arose, and the tread of feet upon the flagged hall; a bolt jarred back, the door opened, and a girl bearing a candle stood beyond the threshold. Raising the candle head-high—and thereby revealing a sharp face set in unruly brown hair—the girl peered into the darkness.

'Is that you, Martin?'

'It is, Hannah.' Martin stepped into the hall. 'An' how's yourself?'

'Ah, the best.' The girl closed the door. 'You'll be late?'

'Ay.' Martin hung his hat upon a peg and stood his stick in a corner. 'I couldn't help myself. But I'm time enough.'

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'Ah, plenty indeed.' Hannah nodded towards the end of the passage. 'They're all above—all 'cept herself.'

'I know.' Martin turned. 'An' where's herself then?'

'There.' With her thumb Hannah indicated the kitchen and all beyond it; then without further speech stepped along the hall and, Martin following, went into the parlour.

The room was small, lighted by a hanging lamp and warmed by a peat fire. The ceiling was low and smoked; the floor uneven and bare; upon the walls, themselves covered with a pink-and-brown paper, were some faded prints in tarnished frames. In the furthest corner stood a narrow cupboard giving sight of painted china through its glass front; beside it hung a Dutch clock, and from it towards the fireplace ran blue-and-white curtains that hid the mysteries of a high wall-bed. A whip, a gun, some sticks and umbrellas, a horse standard and a broken spinning-wheel, stood near the fireplace. On the mantelpiece were ornaments in china and moulded glass; above it hung a flaming oleograph of the great and good King William, some family portraits in

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gilded frames, a sampler set in a border of fir-cones, an Orange lodge certificate on this side, a grocer's almanac on that. In the window recess were geraniums in pots. A horse-cloth couch faced the fire. Here and there were painted chairs. Adown the room ran a mahogany table, decked with gilt-edged books, a waxen ornament below a glass case, a clasped Bible; and around it, in formidable array, the Fallon party sat ready for business.

'Good evenin',' said they, as Martin entered, and shuffled their feet.

'Good evenin' all,' answered Martin; then pulled up a chair and sat down.

At the top of the table, his face towards the window and his back to the bed, sat Hugh Fallon; a sturdy, red-whiskered, square-faced man, with beetling brow, keen eyes, wide mouth, and hard lips. 'Good evenin',' said he to Martin, then snapped his lips and sat looking at the Bible. On Hugh's right, with the china cupboard behind her and head beneath the weights of the clattering clock, was Maria his wife, her hands folded in her lap, a three-cornered shawl about her shoulders, a high black cap luring the eye from her long

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yellow face. 'Good evenin',' said she to Martin, then wiped her lips with a hand and sat looking at Hugh. Beside Maria, and between the couch and table, sat a round-shouldered, sleek-haired man, one hand supporting an elbow, the other pulling at his long black whiskers. His name was Samuel Mires, his nickname Sam the Hump; he, having greeted Martin, just turned his genteel head and sat fixing Hannah his sweetheart (now in a chair beside him) with a knowing eye. Facing these and fronting the fire, that man of bluster, Fallon's brother-in-law, Big Ned Noble, had a side of the table to his own self. 'Good evenin', Squire,' said he with the rest; then, as Martin pulled forward his chair, stretched out a big hand and added: 'Proud to see ye, Martin me son; glad an' proud to see ye.'

Martin unbuttoned his coat, fingered his scarf-pin, rested an elbow on the table, thrust a hand into his watch-pocket, and leant back in his chair. He was Martin the Squire now; not the Martin that Kate had seen, or his mother, but nearer his ordinary self, cool, keen, confident, strong. 'I 'm sorry to be

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late,' he said, addressing the company, 'but business kept me. I hurried my best.'

'We know that, Martin,' answered Ned Noble, speaking for his party. 'Time enough, me boy. Sure it's a long night till mornin'.'

Martin nodded a reply. For a moment the clock wagged above a silent company; then Martin shifted in his chair and looked at Red Hugh. 'Well,' said he, 'there's no good waitin', I suppose?'

Hugh's eyes moved slowly from the Bible and met Martin's. 'No,' he said, 'there isn't.' He looked round at Maria his wife, glanced at the empty chair that stood between Ned and the half-open door, leant over the table and cleared his throat. 'Well,' he began; but already was the word with Ned Noble.

'Aisy,' said Ned, a big hand rising in protest; 'aisy now. Mebbe it's *on*-regular, an' mebbe't isn't; but on me left here sits Himself; may I ax where's Herself?'

Himself (so called) twisted impatiently by the table; the father of Herself looked again at his wife; it was Herself's sister who spoke. 'You won't see her this night,' said Hannah, breaking the spell of Sam Mire's gaze. 'Horses

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wouldn't drag her here. I dunno where she is. I did me best wi' her, an' 'twas all no use.'

'I know,' answered Ned, with a puckering of his wise brow and a wag of the head. 'Well, no matter, anyway. I suppose it 's all right, but— Now aisy, I tell ye,' added Ned, and raised his hand against the impatient Martin; 'just one minit, I ax ye. It struck me, seein' be chance the Book there afore me, an' knowin' what we 're all together for, that mebbe some one'—and Ned looked slyly at Red Hugh, sitting dour at the head of the table—'some one 'd wish to start proceedin's wi' a mouthful o' prayer. It might do no harm, thinks I; mebbe it 'd do us good. What d' ye think yourselves now?' asked Ned, his eyes roving the company.

In her corner Mrs. Fallon sat impassive beneath the clock; beside her Sam Mires plucked thoughtfully at his whiskers; Hannah scowled black at Ned, and tried to kick him beneath the table; with eyes fast upon the Bible Red Hugh sat bending his brow and communing with himself. Was the occasion fitting? thought Hugh. Was this the time and place to exercise his great gift of prayer

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in asking Divine counsel and indulgence? Man was feeble, his deliberations . . . And with that Martin Hynes broke in upon the silence.

'Here,' cried he abruptly, with a thump upon the table, 'enough o' this foolery. We want no prayin' to settle what's to be done here. Let that wait till Sunday. It's business now.' Hard and decisive was Martin's voice; his eyes glittered, a flush spread upon his face. Scowling black at the protesting Ned, he flung forward in his chair and bent over the table. 'Hugh Fallon,' said he, 'you're slow to start, so I'll take the lead. You know what I'm here for; you know what you're there for. It's not bleather we want now, it's business. Well, you know me an' the kind of me. You went to school wi' my father; you knew him all his days; you followed his funeral, an' you know what he left to me when he died. There's no need to go over all that, an' there's less need to tell you about myself. You know all about me. You know me for a good Protestant an' a man o' my word; an' Hillside above there speaks for itself.'

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All the company were now bending towards Martin, their eyes keen on his face. Red Hugh leant forward with his head resting on a hand; Mrs. Fallon's hands were clasped upon the table; Sam the love-lorn sat humped and solemn; Hannah, with her elbows sprawling before her, sat rapt in admiration of Hynes; Big Ned lolled back towards the fire, the lines of his wise brow glistening with heat, his arms folded majestically on his breast. And facing them all, with Red Hugh filling his eyes, sat Hynes, rapping out sharp words with a boastful air of contempt.

'Well,' Martin went on, in his arrogant way, 'I 've paid my attentions to your daughter Jane off an' on this while back; an' I 'm willin' to marry her. She 's willin' too, I 'm thinkin': but all that 's neither here nor there. It 's about somethin' else we 've got to talk now. Fallon, you know as well as I do what 's before her. You know what she 'll be an' what she 'll get. She 'll have me, an' she 'll have Hillside yonder an' all that 's in it. Maybe she 'll not be the worst off in the Barony, nor the second worst; but that 's

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not for me to say. She can act the lady if she likes, and be her own mistress if it 's her wish. There 's horses, an' traps, an' a share of good furniture; an' for food and raiment she 'll need nothin'. She 'll——' With a gesture of impatience Martin sat upright and broke from the word. 'Enough o' that,' he cried, flinging out a hand. 'You all know Queen Anne 's dead. Come, Fallon, have I said enough?'

With a quick shuffling of feet and creaking of chairs, the company turned towards Red Hugh and fixed him with expectant eyes; greedy, you might think, for the noise of battle. But Hugh sat stolidly beyond the table, looking at his great hairy hands, and considering with himself; sat impassive and silent whilst the clock wagged a minute, then raised his eyes slowly and met Martin's across the table.

'Plenty,' answered he with studied deliberation; and added in the next breath—'so far as it goes.' He paused at that, clenched a fist upon the table, and looking at it went on. 'All you 've said I was willin' to hear, but I knew it all before ye said it. I know all about

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ye, as far as I can see; but there's a thing or two I don't know,' said Hugh, still weighing each word and looking steadily now at Martin, 'an' I'd like to have your word on them.' Hugh's voice quickened, his eyes narrowed. 'What's this I hear about the mortgage that Bob Hicks over there has on Hillside?'

The breath of coming battle quickened in the room. Mrs. Fallon's fingers darted at her lips; Hannah drew a breath stridently and turned eager eyes upon Hynes; Mires shot forth his head like a watching fox; Big Ned smote the table with heavy hand and said, 'Right, Fallon, right'; but Martin clutched quick at the table and bent towards Red Hugh.

'Who told you that, Fallon?' he questioned, in rising wrath. 'Tell me the scoundrel's name.'

'If I did,' answered Hugh, 'I'd have to name a whole townland.'

'It's lies!' shouted Hynes; 'damned lies—an' ye know it, Fallon. Who said it?' he asked again, nor so much as heard the 'Aisy, aisy now,' that came pleadingly from Ned the peacemaker.

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'Every one says it.'

'It's lies!' shouted Hynes with the fierce protestation of a liar. 'There's no mortgage. It's lies, I say!'

Again came the unavailing plea of the peacemaker. Hannah voiced her belief in Martin and fell to scowling at her father. Mrs. Fallon sat looking nervously from face to face, a hand plucking at her husband's sleeve. But Hugh sat stolid as an ox within his high-backed chair, nor heeded any but Martin and his words.

'Well, that's as may be,' he said. 'It's one word against another. If ye say it's lies, well then I believe ye.'

'I 'm thankful to you,' sneered Martin.

'You're welcome,' answered Hugh with a nod; then paused, and continued: 'But there's more yet that people'll be sayin'. What's this I hear about your debts?'

'Debts? What debts?'

'Aw, debts to one an' another about the country—a trifle to Smith of Bunn . . .'

'Lies,' said Martin.

'—Twenty pounds or so to Graham of the shop below in Derryvad . . .'

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'Another lie!'

'—A matter of twenty more on interest to Hughes of Lismahee . . .'

'Danged lies!'

'—Another trifle here an' another there to people in different parts . . .'

'It's lies, I say,' shouted Hynes; 'all lies. I owe nothin'.' Pausing abruptly, he half rose and leant towards Hugh. 'Tell me, Fallon: d'you believe these things o' me?'

'I believe nothin'.' Hugh's eyes were inscrutable. 'I tell ye only what I hear.'

Martin's hand crashed down on the table. 'Answer me straight, Fallon: d'you believe these things o' me?'

'I believe nothin'.'

'Answer me, dang you! D'you believe the rascals that have been slanderin' me, or d'you believe me?'

Hugh hesitated in replying, and with that Hynes stood upright, kicked back his chair and turned towards the door. 'It's just as ye please, mister,' said he, with a careless wave of the hand. 'Believe me an' I'll take your apology, believe them an' out I go.'

Red Hugh gave way. Debts or no debts,

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mortgage or no mortgage, he had no desire to close the door on Hynes. He was a man of mark and standing, a likely friend and neighbour, a True Blue, a branch of the right stock. He had faults, to be sure; he was proud, quick-tempered, reckless, had been doubtful in his ways of late and no friend to Hillside; neither, in Hugh's opinion, was his manner that night altogether satisfying, nor his fierce pose of denial entirely above suspicion. Those debts existed, Hugh was assured; of his true motives in choosing Jane, Hugh had shrewd conjecture. For all that, he was no man to let slip merely for sake of a trifle. Enough were effected if the extravagance of his hopes was now somewhat tempered by sobering doubts of his claims. He honoured the house with his presence, would honour it still more with his alliance. Hannah worshipped him, Maria knelt at his feet; the countryside rang in his praise. Faults and all, he made for Jane a chance and a match far better than she might hope. No; he was not to be lost. 'Sit down in your chair, Martin Hynes,' said Hugh; and at sound of the words how Maria sighed relief, and Hannah breathed satisfac-

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tion, and Big Ned thumped approval in the face of Mires the genteel; 'an' make yourself easy. I take your word, an' I make my apology. Sit down, Martin, sit down.' And wearing the smile of a victor, dubious though victory might be, Martin lowered sword and obeyed.

So far very good; and now, this preliminary skirmish well over, came the real ranging for battle, the advancing by Hynes in swift boldness of attack, the manœuvring of Fallon for position of defence. No time was wasted. Affairs were in hand. 'What,' asked Hynes, 'was the sum and kind of the fortune which Fallon was ready to convey as the marriage-portion of Jane his daughter?'

A hush fell in the parlour. Big Ned thrust his hands into pockets, wrinkled his wise brow, and fixed his eyes on the family Bible. Mrs. Fallon coughed nervously behind a hand, then wiped her lips and, by way of Mires and his sleek head, exchanged knowing looks with the expectant Hannah. Martin caught his thumbs in his waistcoat-pockets, tilted back his chair, and fell to balancing precariously between the table and window. Hugh looked

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thoughtfully at the portrait of King William, sought a minute's inspiration within the fire, then glanced round the company, blinked shrewdly, flung back his shoulders and began.

At first words came slowly and with due deliberation of thought and manner; but, once warmed to work and his tongue loosened, Hugh flung off reserve and spoke boldly. He was glad to have sight of Martin there beyond the table and was proud of his company. He wished him long life, much prosperity, and his portion of happiness in this mortal world. He was well aware of Martin's gifts and virtues; he would be glad to welcome him as one of the family; he hoped that everything might be amicably settled and have the blessing of the Almighty. Still, he was anxious to make things clear, to explain himself, to remove misapprehension. It passed current in Gorteen, and elsewhere no doubt, that he, Hugh Fallon, was a man of means and substance, and that, consequently, his daughters upon marriage would bring with them large fortunes in money and considerable portions in the shape of household and personal effects. So people fancied and spoke, not knowing what they said,

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and so, doubtless, Martin himself had heard and believed. Well, all this maybe was meant kindly and did small harm, but busybodies seldom got in sight of the truth. They made mountains of molehills and plucked figs of thistles. Eyes had they and saw not, and hearing did not understand. 'Far be it from me,' said Hugh, bobbing oratorically towards the company, 'to forbid idle tongues, but truth remained when all was said. Now what are the facts?' asked Hugh, pushing forth a hand and lying back in his chair. 'What are the facts, I say?'

Quick at heel of the words came Martin's answer, sudden and fierce as a squall from the hills. 'Dang your facts,' said Martin, both voice and manner big with arrogant contempt, 'an' dang your talk, Hugh Fallon! D'you think I'm a fool? D'you think I don't see what you're drivin' at? If you can't belittle me, you 'll belittle yourself; there 's your game in a word. Come, I 'm sick of your bleather! It 's business we want, not talk; an' what I 'm wishful to hear is not your excuses but what you 'll give with the girl.'

Here was plain speaking indeed; like bolts

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from above the words hurtled amid the company, bringing sudden dismay. The women sat breathless; Mires made wondering eyes; hardly might Ned Noble give voice to his feelings. 'Young man, young man,' cried Ned, 'that's a foolish way to talk. You'll gain nothin' be goin' to work like that! Aisy now, aisy.'

'Ah, stop that bull's roar of yours,' stormed Martin. 'Come, Fallon; I'm waitin'.'

Fallon had flushed crimson; his jaw was set, his eyes glowed; and when, presently, words came to him again his voice rang hard. He was obliged to Hynes for his interruption; he thanked him for his plain talk. Not often before had he been insulted in his own house; but let all that go. He would take the young man at his word, and would say at once what Jane his daughter would have as fortune. *Item*, her grey pony. *Item*, her brindled cow and calf. *Item*, sundry hens and chickens of her own. *Item*, a wooden bedstead and fittings. *Item*, a mahogany chest of drawers . . .'

'Take all that afterwards,' said Hynes. 'What's the money?'

'I'll take it when I like,' answered Fallon

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in wrath, shouting down the voice of Big Ned the peacemaker.

'You'll do what I say,' persisted Hynes. 'What's the money?'

And hammering the table Fallon made answer, 'Fifty pound in notes'; then glared defiance and lay back in his chair.

Fifty pounds? No wonder Maria and Hannah exchanged wondering looks; no wonder Big Ned found speech wither on his tongue; no wonder Mires fell to dalliance with his whiskers and shrewd pondering of the prospect that now lay before himself. Fifty pounds! Why, rumour and their own knowledge had set Jane's fortune at not less than three times that sum; why, Hannah herself, thought Mires, had never warmed imagination with prospect of less than twice just that. Fifty pounds? No wonder Hynes stared blankly at Fallon; then flung back his head and laughed. *Fifty pounds and Jane Fallon?* Oh, powers above!

'Fifty pounds,' cried he at last; 'is that what you say? Fifty pounds! Ah, quit your nonsense, Hugh Fallon. Man, you're a fool at a joke. D'you hear what he says?' asked

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Hynes of Maria. 'D' you hear him, Hannah? An' you, Mires, beyond there? An' you, Ned Noble? D' you hear, I say?'

'Yes, I hear,' answered Ned with a nod, and speaking, for once, the mind of his party. 'It's your own fault, young man; an' serve ye right, say I. Fight your own battle, me son—an' divil send ye wisdom!'

So Fallon and Hynes crossed swords again, and made grim strife; Hynes attacking strongly and with more discretion than he had hitherto used, Fallon showing bold defence and retiring stubbornly, step by step, till at last his terms of treaty were roundly declared at one hundred pounds. That sum was still far short of Jane's real fortune; but Hugh was roused to anger and obstinacy, was determined that Martin should pay well for his folly, and fight now for his every pound. *Come on*, said Hugh within his defences; *I'm coming*, cried Martin, and sprang for the fray. And the tide of battle swelled.

It was a mighty affair, the greatest maybe that has ever raged on the trampled fields of Gorteen. To this day men speak of it, emotion kindling in their eyes. Red Hugh was

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wonderful, Martin a prodigy of skill and daring. All his arts of tongue and brain, of persuasion and argument and force, Hynes employed; and against them did Fallon array all his strength, nor scorned the good services of his supports—of the reluctant Maria, the treacherous Hannah, the crafty Sam, the voluble Ned striving heroically for terms of peace. Sometimes the din was great. Now the strife grew hot, now cold and deadly. Just as do men in a fair-green over the price of a horse, so did the combatants wrangle: wrangled fiercely for half an hour, then flagged somewhat; at last, under Ned's astute handling, came near an issue.

'Come, boys,' cried Ned; 'enough talk! Listen to me, my sons. Now whisht, Martin, for just a minute. I 'll settle it all in the wink of an eye. Here 's the whole thing as plain as a pikestaff. Hynes here says he 'll take a hundred an' fifty—no less; Fallon there says he 'll give a hundred an' thirty—no more. Come! Be men, an' give me your hands.' Sprawling across the table, Ned seized a hand of either. 'Split the differ, say I, an' make it *a hundred an' forty*. Is it a bargain? Now

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then; no drawin' back; clinch, I tell ye, like men! Clinch, I say—clinch!'

'It 's a hundred an' thirty,' said Fallon.

'Well, curse you for a heart o' stone! Come,' cried Hynes with an oath, his words precisely those that a hundred times he had used in fair and market, 'here 's my last word: make it guineas an' I take the heifer.'

'Pounds!' answered Fallon.

'Guineas!' shouted Hynes, rising from his chair. 'It 's my last word: guineas or nothin'.'

Just a minute Red Hugh sat silent, with all the voices of his party making clamour in his ear; then plucked his hand from Noble, pushed back his chair, and rose. 'It 's guineas, then,' said he; and with the words joy sprang into life amid the company. Hannah's face shone out in triumph; Maria strove with motherly tears; Big Ned cried out *Hurroo*, and smote Sam Mires a friendly thwack. Martin stood swaying on heel and toe and taking congratulation with a smile. Red Hugh turned his back upon the fire; spread his coat-tails and grimly stood watching and considering. Then pipes came out, a bottle was set upon the table;

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Big Ned took glass in hand, faced round towards Martin, and asked for silence. 'Squire, me son,' boomed he; 'I 'm proud——'

And just then, in that moment of Ned's glory, the door was pushed wider and into the room came Jane Fallon.

Very pale and calm, her eyes shining steadily, her head erect and hands clenched, Jane moved among the silent company, noticing no one and saying no word; came to the table, leant a hand upon it and turned towards the fire.

'I 'm thankful to ye all,' said she, her voice going clear through the hush, 'for all you 've done for me——'

'Why, not at all, woman,' blundered Ned Noble; 'sure, not at all. Arrah, what is there to thank us for?'

'I thank ye all,' continued Jane, and silenced Ned with a glance, 'for the good opinion ye have of me, an' I thank ye for the way you 've bought an' sold me this night. Ye meant well, I know; it 's the custom of the country, I know —still, I thank ye one and all.'

The silence broke around Jane as, pausing a moment, she took a quick breath and plucked

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nervously at her neck-band. Hynes and Fallon stood narrowly eyeing her. Again Ned Noble offered suave counsel. Hannah snatched at Jane's sleeve and whispered in her ear. 'Don't be a fool, Jane,' said Maria, her mother, commanding more than advising.

'Ah, I know I 'm a fool,' answered Jane, the words coming plaintively; 'no one need ever tell that to me. I was a fool to listen; I was a fool to come here: but I had to come, an' I must speak. As I said, I 'm thankful to ye all for your good opinion of me; for all that I 'm worth more 'n a houseful o' guineas, an' if you, father an' mother, don't know that then I 'm proud to tell it to ye. Money 's not my price —no—an' it 's you, Martin Hynes, should know it. Your heifer? Your *heifer*!'

Hynes stepped forward. 'Come, Jane,' said he persuasively; 'you 're hard upon me. The word meant nothing. It slipped from me. I 'm sorry for it. Come, Jane; forgive and forget.'

'Forgive an' forget? Ah, yes, indeed! Thank God, I know ye in time.'

'Ah, but, Jane!' Hynes came nearer; his words fell softer. 'Listen to me, now. Can't

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you understand? I swear to you I meant nothin'. I didn't hear myself say the word.'

'But ye meant it; ye meant it. An' there's more than that. Didn't I hear—ah, God forgive me, didn't I hear!'

'It's nothin', Jane, I tell you. Woman alive, it's only the custom . . .'

'It's the money ye want, not me. Thank God, I know ye in time!'

Hynes fell back, convicted and silenced; but Fallon strode from the fire and seized Jane by a shoulder. 'Hold your fool's tongue,' ordered he, 'an' remember who ye are. Your whims and your impudence, indeed! Come, sit ye down an' give heed to your betters; for you'll marry whoever I wish ye to marry.'

'I'll never marry him—never—never!'

'Silence, I say!'

And Jane obeyed.

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CHAPTER IV

IT was late that night when Martin reached home. He rested badly, lying awake for long with jarring thoughts for company, tossing uneasily between dreams, starting up more than once to stare wide into darkness; woke heavily at last in the broad light of morning, dressed hurriedly and hastened down into the kitchen.

There all was bustle and life, the fire blazing high beneath the crook, the air heavy with the odours of cooking and peat smoke. Through the open doorway came sounds of the farmyard, the cackle of fowls, lowing of cattle, bleating of calves, the tramp and jingle of horses, the clatter of cans, the shouts of men in the fields; came also a shine of early sunshine and the shrewd breath of young morning. By the hearth Mary was busy with pot and beetle; near the window George the man-servant sat mending harness; at the long white table, in cap and apron, her sleeves rolled up and skirt tucked high, the

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Mother stood kneading cakes on a wooden tray. At sound of Martin's step she looked round and bade him good morning. He nodded, answered gruffly, and putting on his cap strode into the yard.

The air refreshed him somewhat, as standing on the doorstep he stretched up his arms and yawned at the sky; then hands under coat-tails and blinking at the sunlight, he crossed towards the outhouses for his morning rounds. Everything was in order and every one busy; but the Master was in a bad humour that day and so nothing was right. He would find fault with an angel, said one to another, and slunk from his path. The byre was like a dunghill, said he, the horses half-groomed, the pigs not thriving. Half the haggard was scattered in the yard, more food was wasted in the boiling-house than would feed a troop. He kicked the dogs, swore at the herd, bullied the maid, and killed a marauding chicken with a stone; had a horse saddled at last, and mounting dashed out through the fields. 'An' God send ye don't break your neck,' said Tom the herd at sight of him; 'for the divil 's in your track this day.'

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Half-an-hour's gallop cleansed his blood; and when, in a while, all things being to his mind in the yard and the men gone fieldwards, he stamped into breakfast, his humour had brightened. Flinging his cap upon the dresser shelf, he turned into the pantry, and in the high-backed chair that once had been his father's, took his place at the head of the little table. A cheerful blaze flickered upon the walls. Hot cakes, fried eggs and bacon, wholemeal bread, butter in pats, oatmeal porridge, new milk and steaming tea in a brown pot, crowded the bleached-white cloth. A dog lay upon the hearth, the cat was curled upon a chair. By Martin's plate was yesterday's newspaper, by his mother's a Bible and a book of family prayer: with clasped hands and bowed head she said grace, then in her precise, old-fashioned way turned to the duties of the table.

For a while Martin ate heartily and in silence; then, hunger well allayed, leant back in his chair and cup in hand faced towards the fire. Before him the Mother sat sipping her tea and watching his face.

'Well,' said he in a minute, 'I've settled things at last.' Pausing he reached up his cup

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and met his mother's eyes. 'Ay, I 've settled things.'

'Yes, Martin?' His mother filled the cup and passed it back.

'I 've—I 've—' Martin paused; went on quickly. 'I 'm goin' to be married.'

His mother's eyebrows twitched and her lips tightened; but she made no sign of surprise. The news had come abruptly and was hardly welcome; but it had been long expected. Her day was past. Martin was no longer young. Those goings across the fields had occasioned thought. Rumour and gossip had reached her ears. No more than the inevitable had come. Slowly she put down her cup, steadily raised the teapot. 'Yes, Martin,' she said.

''Twas only last night I made up my mind. It 's been comin' though this good while. I—I—' Again Martin paused in some confusion. 'You want somebody with you, mother. It 's—it 's not fair for you to be doin' what you do, an' lookin' after everything, at your time of life. You want some one—don't you now?'

A smile glimmered in his mother's eyes. Yes, she wanted somebody. Her day was

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past. She nodded. 'Yes, Martin; perhaps I do.'

'All the work there is to do here—baking, cooking, tidying up—an' only you an' the girl to do it! Sure it's not fair. Sure you ought to be doin' nothing in the world now but just restin' yourself. Ought you now?' asked Martin, turning in his chair.

The smile faded in his mother's eyes. Surely the words were true. The days of her work and reign were past. Another must take her place. All that was left for her now was just a while of rest, of calm preparation in this world for the mercies of the next. 'Yes, Martin,' she answered; nor added a word.

'So I went last night and arranged matters —settled the fortune, an' the day, an' all the rest. Oh, everything's settled, everything. It might be better, it might be worse—but—ah, it's good enough!'

Martin sat leaning forward, his back rounded and hands stretched to the fire, his face clouded and somewhat sullen. His mother had disappointed him; he expected sympathy and got coldness, congratulation and found silence. Suddenly he sprang to his feet and faced

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round with his back to the fire. 'Have you nothing to say to me at all?' he asked, harshly and irritably.

His mother looked up at him. 'What can I say? What is there to say?'

'Couldn't you say you were glad, or sorry, or tell me what you think?'

'I—I am glad, Martin. Why should I be sorry?'

'Couldn't you ask me what arrangements I'd made?' Martin continued. 'Or—or who she is?'

'Who she is?' Shrewdly his mother read his face, suspicion sudden in her eyes. 'Why —why——?'

'It's not Kate Trant,' said Martin. 'I'm off there.' He paused, waiting for his mother to speak; then, no word coming, he went on. 'It's Jane Fallon,' he said bluntly; and leaning against the mantelpiece stood looking at the dog. His mother said nothing; so in a while he flung into his chair again and kicked at the blazing peat. 'Oh, I know what you're thinkin',' he broke out, his voice hard and bitter; 'right well I know for all your silence. You're wonderin' at my choice, an' callin' me a fool,

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an' blamin' me about Kate Trant.' Martin turned and waved a hand. 'You needn't be botherin' your head,' he cried; 'for it 's all the same. I *am* a fool—but it 's Jane Fallon for all that.' He stopped there, touched the dog with his foot and rose. 'Come, Tim,' he said, making for the door, 'you 'll say no less to me than another.'

But already his mother had risen. She stopped him, with a hand upon his arm. 'Martin,' she pleaded, 'don't go like that. You mustn't be angry with me, or mistake me. My son, of course I 'm glad; but surely you understand. It 's a surprise, Martin; it 's a surprise. And then you know I 've no one but you; and it 's not easy to lose you.' Her voice quavered a little. 'You understand, Martin—don't you?'

Martin's face brightened. 'To be sure, mother; to be sure I do.' He laughed and laid a hand upon her shoulder. 'But, woman alive, you 'll not be losing me! Why, I 'll be here just the same. There 'll be no difference at all, except for Jane, and she—sure, she 's like a child in her ways.' Again he laughed, his masterful hand gently shaking her to and

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fro. 'So cheer up,' he said; 'brighten up now an' wish me well.'

'I do, Martin. From my heart I wish you well.' She pulled down his face and kissed it. 'Good luck to you, my son, and God bless you.'

'Amen, mother,' said Martin, and went. But she sat quiet for a while; then read in the Bible; then went upstairs, and came down in cloak and bonnet, and set out through the sunshine.

Dog at heel and gun on shoulder, Martin crossed the yard and took to the fields. The sun was now high and shining wide over the waking earth, filling the great space between mountain and mountain with much light and freshness, stirring hope in the hearts of men, striking life into herb and hedgerow, warming the blood in Martin, as boldly he strode the acres of Hillside, and bringing to him some sense of the good in life. The world seemed to open out before him, big and pleasant, with sunshine full in it, just then, and the clouds suddenly gone; his own little portion of it lying there around him, very bright and kindly. There they spread, those acres of Hillside, not burdened now with mortgage or debt, not wasting

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slowly, it might appear, from fatness or crying out upon neglect, but free and smiling, good and prosperous—his own. After all, things had not been so bad; after all, there was hope in the world. That money, little though it was, would do much; with management and some sacrifice more could be achieved; he would work harder, thought Martin, striding boldly through the sunshine, give less time to pleasure, stand a free man, please God, before long. The worst was over. Kate knew—oh, poor Kate! Jane and her money were his. He had told the mother. Trouble was behind, hope and the world in front; Hill-side was his, the day was glorious: then a fig for worry, thought Martin, and broke into song as he went.

He made the circuit of the hills, took stock of the horses and cattle with eyes keen for the chances of profit and loss, made survey of those fields ready for crop and those destined for meadow, took a turn through the rushes in hope of a shot, spent an idle hour with the men, exchanging news and story, giving counsel and opinion, in the Five-acre field; then shouldered gun again and took his way

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across the flats that lay between Hillside and the farm of Hugh Fallon. In high spirits he went, and full of comely strength; his thoughts roving generously and going out sometimes, not unkindly, towards that little pale-faced Jane whose betrothed he was.

Coming presently to Fallon's house, he turned through a side gate, went along a lane, across the yard, and dog at heel strode into the kitchen. A great fire burned upon the hearth; flitches of bacon, salted hams, bladders, bunches of herbs and smoked bream, hung from the soot-browned joists; a long painted dresser faced the fire; an inner door (which, as Martin entered, was pulled close) gave access, beyond the tiled floor, to the hall; by the window stood a deal table, and at it, in linsey bodice, quilted petticoat and long white apron, Jane Fallon was ironing linen.

'Ha! The top of the morning to you, Jane!' Martin stood his gun by the dresser, ordered the dog to the hearth, sat himself on a corner of the table and folded his arms. 'Busy as usual, I see.'

Jane had not greeted him with a word; now she put her iron on its stand and looked up at

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him. 'Ay, I'm busy as usual,' she said, then folded a fresh garment and bent again to work.

'You're always busy, Jane. Never did I know your like in the world. Why, woman dear, you're killing yourself! You're as pale as death. Come, now, drop that iron for a minute an' give us a word.'

Jane's lips closed firmly; to and fro her hand moved steadily; no word or look did she give Martin.

'Come, Jane, I bid you.' No answer came. 'D' you hear me, Jane?' Still the iron rose and fell. 'Then, dang me, you'll have to speak!' Dropping from the table, Martin came towards her with arms outstretched and would have seized her. But Jane drew back, iron still in her hand, and faced him boldly.

'Keep away,' she said; 'keep away from me. I don't want ye.'

'Don't you, faith. Then I want you!' Martin came nearer, his hands still out, his face almost eager. 'Come, Jane, enough foolishness.' He caught her by an arm and bent towards her, but quickly she twisted away.

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'Keep back, I say!' Her voice was sharp and imperative. 'I don't want ye.'

'Ah, but, Jane. Listen now——'

'I 'll not listen. Ye can't tempt me.' Stooping, Jane laid her iron on the hearth, then faced Martin again. 'D' ye think I forget?' she asked, her voice finding bitterness. 'D' ye know me so little as to think one night 'd change me? . . . Your *heifer!* "Give me so much," ye said, "an' I 'll take the heifer." That 's what ye think of me—*that!*'

Martin's hands fell; he drew back a step and stood looking, not quite scornfully, at Jane. 'Well, well,' said he, 'was there ever such a puzzle in God's world as a woman? Tell her a thing till you 're tired, an' the next minute it 's just as if you hadn't spoke.' His voice rose suddenly. 'Ah, quit your foolishness, Jane Fallon! D' you imagine I must be always explainin' myself? For the last time, I tell you the word meant nothin' an' I 'm sorry for it.'

'I say it did!' Jane's eyes flashed; her voice was shrill and tense. 'I say, no matter what the word meant, ye bargained for me as if I 'd been what ye said. It 's not me ye

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want, it's my money. . . . An' ye lied last night, Martin Hynes; hard an' sinfully ye lied. I knew it by your voice. I see it now in your face. Ye are in debt—an' you'd use me to pay it. I know it, I know it!' Almost triumphantly Jane cried her knowledge; then, in a moment, her voice changed and she went on plaintively. 'Ah, the disappointment—the bitter disappointment! I was a fool. I trusted ye. I believed your words. I thought ye wanted me for myself. An' now . . .' A sob choked back the words.

Now was Martin's chance; for a woman in tears is at your knowing man's feet. Softly he drew nearer, softly spoke. 'Ah, whisht, Jane, whisht now. God knows, I do care for yourself. Why, you know it! Look at me an' see, look at my face an' see. Jane. Ah, is it scorn me for sake of a word you'd do? Jane!'

He took her in his arms, and for a moment she stood wavering. He was such a strong, handsome man; his ways were so masterful, his voice so soft and pleading. Maybe she had misjudged him; maybe he did care for herself alone? No! Quickly she found

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strength and drew from him. 'No, no,' she cried again; 'don't tempt me! Never, never! Ye may go. Never in this world will I marry ye.'

'But, Jane. Woman, dear, would you break my heart?'

'Break your heart! Ah, words come easy to ye,' said Jane; then drew herself erect and spoke out: 'Martin Hynes, this is my last word to ye. Ye may carry your soft words to some one else, for I don't believe them; an', God helping me, your wife I 'll never be. Till last night I did care for ye an' believe in ye: now I don't care a straw for ye; the face o' ye is hateful to me, an' the false words o' ye. I know ye now—thank God, I know ye in time! Ye may go, I say; for never in life will ye tempt me': and stooping for her iron Jane turned again to work.

A little way out from the hearth, with his back towards the passage door—ajar now and moving slightly—Martin stood eyeing Jane, a hand in either waistcoat-pocket, his legs spraddled, and a frown on his face. Here was a pretty business, he thought; here a pretty position for one of his kind to find—

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he, Martin Hynes, owner of Hillside and equal of any in three townlands. Angrily his eyes fell upon Jane, searching out her defects. He saw her narrow lean figure, somewhat sharp about the shoulders, a little clumsy about the waist; saw her sleek black hair drawn tight into a long coarse net, her pale face with its high brow, pointed nose and chin, her toil-worn hands and bony wrists, her heavy boots, her peasant's dress. She looked worn, old, delicate. Hardly an attraction could he find in her. With a score of women he could name—Kate Trant among them—she compared to their advantage. Her gentle speech and ways were boorish just then, her simplicity of mind and character mere foolishness; she seemed ignorant, plebeian. And she flouted him! He had a mind to take her at her word. Only—only—she had money. Yes, defects and all, Jane was worth her money. Again he drew near to her.

'Look here, Jane, don't be foolish. You're saying what you don't mean. Heaven above, you'd think I was a thief! Suppose I was sharp, didn't your father make me? Come now?'

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Jane did not answer.

'I ask your pardon. I ask you to forgive and forget. Come, won't that satisfy you?'

Jane kept silent, her lips tight and quivering.

'I 'm ready to do anything you ask, or say anything. Look at me, Jane, an' answer me.'

But Jane would not look or answer; and at that Martin turned with an oath, took up his gun, called the dog from the hearth, and strode for the door. 'As you like, my lady,' shouted he; 'as you like. Stay there an' sulk till you 're tired, for I 'm sick o' you, by God!'

The door banged and Jane was alone—alone in the storm that broke swift upon her through that inner door.

In hot anger Martin crossed the yard, and through a gateway took to a footpath that ran through the fields on towards Drumhill. The day had waxed brighter; spring was breathing in the air; on every side the earth was stirring in the sunshine; but in Martin's heart was now only blackness, in his eyes blind wrath. Tramping heavily, he strode along, storming within himself. The insolence of the woman,

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her whims and folly! Who was she to dare such impudence? Who was he—Martin Hynes of Hillside—to lower himself to her? Let her go. He had been a fool, and this was his punishment. Well rid he was of the jade. All the money in Gorteen would not make her price. Oh, he'd make her rue the day, he'd show her the kind he was, stormed Martin; then went through a gap and came to the field in which Red Hugh was working.

In his homespun trousers and leggings, moleskin waistcoat and peaked cap, his arms bare to the elbows, his shirt open upon his chest, Hugh bent over his spade, wielding it with that slow dogged strength, that grim determination to dominate the clay, to force it into fruitfulness, which in all his works and ways was manifest. He allowed no chances of failure. Every spadeful fell artfully in its own place, every clod was humoured. He knew exactly what to do, and did it with the diligence of a slave. His own master and servant he was. Neither himself nor any who wrought for him did he spare. He lived to work, and the world in his eyes was a stern place of toil. No eye had he for the paltry externals, what fools called

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the beauties, of nature. For him the sun shone, the rain fell, the earth quickened, in due service of spade and plough. No heed might he spare for the ways of his neighbours; his own narrow affairs sufficed for him, and so preoccupied was he, that glorious morning, with these that the sound of Martin's voice gave him first news of his coming.

'A pretty way to be treated!' Martin strode up, stood his gun between his feet, and flung out an arm. 'To flout me, an' gibe at me, an' sulk when I spoke! I 'm done with her. I 'm sick of her.'

Slowly Hugh drew himself upright, rested his arms on his spade-head, and calmly met Martin's eyes. 'I bid ye good mornin', young man,' said he, 'even if you 're not civil enough to bid it to me. What 's all this about, may I ask?'

'Dang your civility,' answered Martin; 'a lot o' that there 's to spare these parts. If you 'd teach some to that daughter o' yours above, maybe she 'd know her place in the world. I 'm sick of her.'

'I know.' Hugh nodded gravely. 'It 'll be Jane that 's riled ye?'

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'Ay, it's Jane. She's—she's— Ah, I've no words for her!'

'I know.' Again Hugh nodded. 'An' what might she be doin'?'

'I came to her like a lamb. I gave her every duty. I apologised like a beggar-man. I asked her to forgive an' forget. I bore with her till I wonder at myself. An' what does she do?' Martin's arm swung out. 'Scorns me—tells me she hates me—says she'll never marry me—sulks before me in silence. She—she—she does that!'

'I see.' Hugh set a foot upon the ridge, leant an elbow upon his knee, looked thoughtfully at his boot. 'Well?'

'Just as if the compliment was on her side,' spluttered Martin. 'Just as if she was the only woman in the world, or the only woman with——'

'Money,' said Hugh quietly.

'Ah, dang the money!' shouted Martin. 'Would all the money in the bank excuse her? D'ye think it's her money I care about?'

'Naw. Maybe ye don't. Still, it's worth considerin'.'

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'It's worth nothin'. Dang her money, I say!'

Red Hugh drew himself upright, slowly as an ox in rising, and pointed a finger at Martin. 'Look here, young man,' said he, 'take my advice and don't be a hypocrite as well as a fool. You're angry now an' words are light in ye: well, say no more till your blood's cool.'

'Angry? An' wouldn't an angel be angry? Whew! Be the Lord,' shouted Martin, thumping his gun upon the clay, 'she's maddened me.'

Hugh turned and spat upon the ground. 'Ah,' said he, 'I'm weary hearin' ye. You an' your tantrums! Have ye learned no wit in all the years that you've lived? Man, you're a fool! Ach, quit wi' ye,' shouted Hugh in face of Martin's protest, 'an' listen to sense! What if she does rile ye, an' try her whims on ye? Will that break a bone in ye? Isn't it only her woman's way, just the way of her breed? Lord pity ye if that's all the management you've got. Why didn't ye let her have her fling, an' then take her in your arms——'

'But I did,' cried Martin. 'I gave her every chance. I humoured her to the last word.'

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'Ay, I know.' Fallon smiled sardonically. 'An' then ye pleased her by tearin' away like a mad bull. Tut. You're a fool, I say.' Again he levelled a finger at Martin. 'Listen to me, young man; if ye want Jane—an' her money—you've only got to take them. If ye don't want them, then'—he shrugged his shoulders—'you're wastin' me time, an' I'll wish ye good mornin'.'

Hugh spat on his hands, drove his spade into the clay, and fell to work. Leaning upon his gun, Martin stood watching him and considering with himself. Anger had now died in him, its place held by shrewder passions. Perhaps Hugh was right; maybe he had been foolish. Jane was peculiar, liked humouring, was only a woman. If he wanted her—and her money—he had only to take them. After all, she was no worse now than she had been last night. He mustn't be blind, mustn't throw away chances. 'You think that, Fallon?' he asked. 'You think it's only her way?'

'I think nothin'; I'm sure of it.'

'But suppose she's in earnest? Suppose she keeps to her word?'

'Suppose!' Hugh shot upright. 'What

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supposin' is there? Amn't I her father? Doesn't she know her duty? . . . Leave her to me, young man,' said Fallon, waving a hand and stooping to work. 'Go your ways an' leave her to me.'

So Martin shouldered his gun and went his ways, striding now in full sunshine across the basking fields. His heart was light again, his world big with promise. He forgave Jane, even spared her now and then a generous thought. To any that he met his greeting was hearty. Across the hedges he shouted salutation to the men of Gorteen. Nearing Hillside he saw a figure in cloak and bonnet turn through the gateway; hurried on to offer kind services and overtook his mother in the avenue.

'Why, mother; it's you? Think of this now. Out in your regimentals your lee lone, an' me to overtake you! Where in glory have you been?'

'Ah, Martin, my son.' The Mother looked up at him; her face was pale and weary, and she breathed heavily, as slowly she plodded along leaning on a stick. 'I 'm—I 'm glad to see you.'

'But where have you been? Why didn't

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you get George to drive you? Who have you been to see?'

'Oh, nowhere in particular, Martin. I—I wanted a walk. It 's such a beautiful morning.'

'But you *have* been somewhere. I know it.' Martin stopped and turned the Mother towards him. 'Look here, you 've been to Leemore—to see Kate?'

Feebly she stood before him, asking pardon with her eyes. 'Yes, Martin,' she said, 'I 've been to see Kate.'

'I knew it. An' you 'd hide it from me! What business had you to go? What right have you to go interferin'?' Martin's hand was rough on her arm, his voice was hard. 'What did you go for? What did you say?'

'I had no business to go, Martin—but I said nothing. I saw Kate—but I said nothing.'

The words were true. Moved by pity she had gone to see Kate, with a woman's tact had given her sympathy without meddling a word. In the little room beyond the pillars she had sat with Kate a while, had exchanged civilities with Kate's mother in the kitchen, had smiled on the children as she passed through the school; at the gate had taken Kate's hand and

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looked at her as she said good-bye. The look was enough. Kate understood, and was grateful.

But Martin might never understand; for him women were always women and facts facts.

'I don't believe you,' he said bluntly. 'You have been interferin'. Now see here, mother. You mean well, I know; but, like a good woman, leave my affairs alone an' keep your schemin' for things nearer home. You understand?'

'Yes, Martin.'

'An' you'll not go to Leemore again. You understand that?'

'Yes, Martin.'

'That's right.' He took his mother's arm and walked on. 'And now we'll see about dinner.'

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CHAPTER V

LEANING on his spade, a hand gripping his chin, his eyebrows knitted above his knowing eyes, Red Hugh watched Martin go boldly across the fields; then, with a smothered growl, turned and bent to work. 'Ay,' he said aloud, and spoke scornfully as to one on the clay beneath him, 'you an' your gun an' your dog! Playin' the gentleman when ye ought to be payin' your debts, airin' your impudence in the face of your betters! Serve ye right, me play-boy, if Jane didn't take ye. Dang her money, ye say—ah, ye hypocrite! Still . . .' Driving hard at his spade, Hugh gave himself to the silent labour of thought, there grim and solitary amid the glory of the fields.

In a while he looked at the sun, scraped the clay from his boots, wiped his forehead with the lining of his cap, and tramped home to dinner. The table was set in the kitchen:

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knives and forks scattered upon the bare boards, a great dish of potatoes in the middle, plates and a dish of fried bacon at the end facing Hugh's chair. Without word or ceremony he flung his cap on the dresser, sat down, asked a blessing, served, and began to eat. Maria his wife threw off her *praskeen* and took the chair facing Hugh; Hannah came in from the dairy with a noggin of milk and took her place on Hugh's left; Jane came through the passage doorway, her skirt still tucked high, her arms bare to the elbows, and sat herself on Hugh's right. No greeting passed from one to another, no useless words of gossip or comment marred the business of eating; all ate heartily and somewhat noisily without any affectation of refinement. Maria's face was sullen, Hannah's flushed; at intervals the eyes of these two met, parted slowly and rested on Jane. Hugh wrought diligently over his plate, with jerking elbows and bent head. Jane might have been alone with herself, so reserved she was, such little notice she gave to anything save the food before her.

Presently Maria drank deep from the noggin, passed it to Hannah, and looked at

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Hugh. 'Martin came this mornin',' said she, then glanced at Jane. 'Maybe ye seen him?'

Hugh reached his fork for a potato and fell to peeling it. 'I did,' growled he.

'Ha!' Maria waited a minute. 'Well?' Maria paused again, her eyes, like Hannah's, quick on Hugh's face. 'Didn't he say anythin'?'

Hugh reached for another potato. 'He did.'

Again silence fell. Impatiently Hannah and her mother sat hungering for news. Quietly Jane possessed herself. Stolidly Hugh bent over his plate. 'But what did he say?' cried Hannah at last. 'What did he do?'

'Leave that to me,' answered Hugh. 'You 'll know in good time.'

'To you!' Hannah bent forward, her eyes glowing, knife and fork upright in her hands. 'An' isn't it our business as much as yours? Have we no right to a word?'

Hugh looked up. 'Màybe you've had it,' said he, with a lift of his eyebrows.

'Had it? How? Is it to her beyond there?' asked Hannah, levelling her knife at Jane. 'Is it to her, ye mean?'

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'Maybe.'

'An' you'd take her part!' Like a flash Hannah turned and spoke. 'You'd let Martin go? You'd let a fool like that'—again Hannah's knife flashed towards Jane—'disgrace us all?'

Hugh's hand went up. 'Enough o' that; enough, I say!'

'But it's not enough,' cried Hannah. 'I tell ye she's a fool. I tell ye it's a sin. She's mad! Ye don't know, father; ye can't know what she said and did.'

'Enough,' shouted Hugh. 'Be quiet, jade!'

'I 'll not be quiet. I will speak.'

Hugh rose, big and threatening, and pointed towards the door. 'Go from my sight,' he ordered; and without a word Hannah rose and went.

Dinner was now over. Silently Maria crossed to the fire and stirred it beneath the kettle; silently Jane tied on her apron and began clearing the table. Hugh pulled a stool to the hearth and, leaning towards the blaze, sat pondering, whilst Maria prepared his customary bowl of tea. It was his one indulgence of the flesh; gravely he took it, permitting

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to-day no jesting allusions to his weakness, nodded his thanks, drank the tea slowly in long satisfying gulps; then set down the bowl, leant against the chimney-jamb, and crossing his legs began to smoke. Soon his head fell forward, his lips ceased to move; noisily he slept.

When he awoke, Jane had gone and only Maria was in the kitchen, her hands deep in a basin of potatoes and meal for the fowls. He rose, yawned heavily and stretched his limbs; crossed to the dresser for his cap and made for the door. Maria set her basin on the table and followed him. 'Hugh,' she said, 'you 're not goin' to take Jane's part? You 'll not let Martin go?'

He stepped into the yard, stopped, and stood looking at the sky. 'It 's all right, Maria,' he said. 'Leave it to me.'

'But you 'll not, Hugh?' Maria faced him and clutched his waistcoat. 'Tell me you 'll not. She 's mad. I 've talked till I 'm hoarse at her, an' she 's like a stone. You 'll make her, Hugh; say you will.'

'Leave it to me, Maria.'

'But, Hugh, dear! Listen to me. Tell me . . .'

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'Leave her to me, Maria. I 'll manage her.'

Slowly and heavily Hugh trudged along the path, his hands clasped behind him and his eyes roving the fields; came to his spade, standing there like a sentinel of the clay, loosened his shirt and resumed work. The sun fell hot on his back, bringing sweat upon his brow, warming his neck and face to the colour of brick dust. Around him on hill and field all was life and movement, sweetest freshness of springtime and richest bounty: cattle grazing, horses tramping masterfully, men working and shouting, women flaunting their coloured kerchiefs in the sunlight; birds piped in the fragrant hedges or flitted across the ridges, crows went wheeling and clamouring in the sky; the world spun merrily amid the golden hours, but of it or of anything that blessed it Hugh had no heed, save of the dull earth he would conquer and hard thought within him that sweetened toil. He thought of Martin and his affairs, with growing favour; of Jane and her rebellion, with increasing sternness; of his own mundane concerns, with satisfaction. Martin Hynes must be humoured,

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that seemed clear; Jane must be subdued, that was certain; Hugh Fallon was Hugh Fallon—oh, nothing surer in the world. Leave Jane to him; leave everything to him.

About four o'clock Hannah came along the field carrying tea in a can and hot potato-cake in a basket. Without speaking she set down can and basket, turned defiantly and walked away. Hugh gave her the length of a ridge, then put a hand round his mouth and shouted, 'Come back.' Hannah walked on. 'D' you hear me, jade!' Hannah turned and slowly came back. 'Stand there,' said Hugh, nodding at a spot on the grass. In silence Hannah obeyed; in sullen silence, the while Hugh sat munching by his spade, she stood before him, looking fixedly across the field, a finger on her lips, a hand clenched by her side. If only Sam were here, she thought; if only she dared say what was in her mind! But Sam did not come, and she dared not speak: and in a while Hugh finished. 'Now go home,' said he, rising and turning to his spade; 'an' mind your manners for the future, I advise ye. Ye hear me, miss?'

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'Yes, father.' Meekly Hannah answered and went.

The sun sank, the shadows lengthened, slowly life died from the fields; but Hugh laboured on unweariedly, nor gave thought rest. Sometimes his lips moved, or he stood idle a moment looking at his spade, or he laughed grimly as he spat on his hands; and now he spoke a sentence aloud—a sentence of the parental homily he was preparing, or a text from the Scriptures bearing upon the rights of parents and the duties of children. 'You'd defy me,' he said, just as though Hannah or Jane stood before him; 'you'd tell me what you'd be wishful to do. . . . Silence, jade!' And Jane, you might fancy, cowered before him.

The sun fell behind the mountain, peace gathered upon the fields with the pensive twilight; through the mists of evening Hugh trudged slowly homewards, spade on shoulder, and an arm swinging: the day's work over at last. Another sun had set, another night come. Spring was here, work was forward. Let God be thanked.

Leaving his spade in the turf-house, Hugh

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made a round of the yard; looked into the dairy, so fresh and cool beneath the thatch, with its glazed pans and shining tins, its half-filled butter-firkin and oaken churn on the cemented floor; bedded and fed the horse; carried hay in a rope from the haggard, and spread it before the store-fed cattle and the cows that Jane and Hannah were milking; glanced into the sty at the sleeping pigs, took the ladder from the barn door and locked it within the car-house, then wiped his boots with a wisp of straw and went in.

The kitchen was warm and full of cheerful light, heavy with the odours of peat and boiled green-stuff. The porridge pot bubbled above the fire, the kettle sang on the hearth; on the table were bowls and mugs, a noggin of butter-milk and iron spoons. Maria was knitting in a corner. Sam Mires, otherwise Sam the Hump, sat hunched upon a stool, caressing his whiskers and smoking a meerschaum pipe. With his back to the chimney-jamb and his legs crossed, Ned Noble sat at his ease, giving wisdom voice through clouds of smoke.

'Ah, me bould Hugh,' boomed Ned, 'so it's yourself at last. Well, well, now, the

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industrious man ye are! Up wi' the lark, in wi' the moon—sure it 's wonderful ye stand it so well.'

'Good evening,' said Sam in his genteel way across his shoulder.

Without speaking, Maria rose and began preparing supper.

'Good evenin' all,' answered Hugh; then pulled off his waistcoat and hung it with his cap upon the wall, rolled up his shirt-sleeves, filled a tin basin with water from a can, and began washing his hands. His back was to the company; he answered Ned's questions curtly and welcomed his platitudes with grunts and splashings; when, in a while, he turned to the supper-table he took his place silently and in silence ate. Sometimes he nodded a response to Ned's roar, sometimes glanced sideways from his dish and took scornful heed of Sam's delicate toying with spoon and bowl; as Jane and Hannah took their places he gave them each shrewd survey and requited his wife's watchfulness with a meaning stare. 'Leave them to me,' said Hugh's eyes; 'leave everything to me.' And Maria was content. But Jane looked determined, and Hannah sat

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sullen in face of the languishing Sam. Sam was there now; but what availed Sam? In his own house Red Hugh was master.

Big Ned clattered his spoon into the bowl, spread his hands on his waistcoat and sighed profoundly. 'Well, thanks be,' said Ned, 'for good victuals an' a place to put them. Sure the man was a hero that invented eatin'. He was so. Give me a pot o' stirabout an' what milk 'll cool it, an' I envy no king his throne.' He looked at Jane. 'Come, Jane, me girl, give your elbow freedom. Sure you 're only pickin' over there, like a sparrow at a corn-stack. Tut, woman, you 'll have to fatten up for what 's afore ye! Marryin 's no child's play for man or woman. Ah, be the Lord, but it 's Martin Hynes 'll put life in ye when he gets ye beyond in Hillside!'

Jane bent flushing over her plate; Hugh sat glowering across at Ned; Sam Mires grinned his widest at the unresponsive Hannah.

'Troth, an' it 's the fine lady you 'll be then,' Ned kept on, smitten with the charm of his subtle humour, 'all in your silks an' satins by your own hearthstone. Sure, you 'll not know

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us at all; an' as for plain stirabout, you 'll be callin' it pigs' meat. Ay, will ye. It 'll be tay in bed, an' your breakfast in the parlour, an' roast beef from Bunn to tempt your appetite at dinner-time. Aw, to be sure, indeed. Mrs. Martin Hynes, if you please, wi' a ring on her finger an' a horse an' trap to take herself to church! Sure, it 'll be great entirely, so it will. An' there 'll be poor me an' your mother here, an' Hugh himself over there, an' Hannah too as plain Mrs. Mires, all standin' in our tatters, touchin' our hats an' curtsyin' to her ladyship.'

Ned guffawed at the ceiling; Sam Mires writhed merrily in his chair; Hannah (melted at last) tittered and flushed, and said, 'Quit wi' ye, Ned'; Jane sat patiently enduring, very pale, and her lips set; but Red Hugh kicked back his chair and rose.

'Enough o' this foolery,' he said sternly. 'Come, Jane; bring a light to the little room.' And leaving Ned speechless, Hugh strode off.

Jane rose from the table, lighted a candle, and followed her father through the hall up into the parlour; there she lit the hanging lamp, quenched the candle, and folding her

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hands, stood waiting. In his chair beside the wall-bed Hugh was seated, hands in his pockets, and his legs outstretched. He looked at Jane.

'Don't be heedin' them,' he said, almost softly. 'It's their ignorance.' He paused a breath; still with that unusual note of sympathy in his voice, went on, 'What's this I hear about your treatment of Martin? Eh?'

Jane was not prepared for kindness. She stood gazing at Hugh. 'What—what treatment, father?'

'All this about refusin' to marry him; about your ways wi' him this mornin', an' your sendin' him to the rightabout. Is that true?'

'It—it is, father.' Jane stood like a child before its master, halting and diffident.

'An' what possessed ye to do such a thing? Were ye mad—or what?'

Jane did not answer. She stood looking at the big Bible, pale and quiet.

'Answer me, Jane. What possessed ye, I say?'

'I—I dunno, father.'

'Ye don't know? H'm. Well, no matter about that now. You've changed your mind by this, I'm thinkin'?'

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Still Jane stood wordless, her hands folded, the lamplight soft on her face.

'Come. Answer me. You're wiser now than ye were this mornin'?'

Jane drew a long breath. Steadily she looked at Hugh. 'No—no, father.'

'No! You're still thinkin' like that? You're still full o' your whims and nonsense?'

'I am, father. I—' Jane paused; then boldly declared herself: 'I'll never marry him.'

Hugh bent towards the table, leant an elbow upon it, and pointed a finger. 'Now, look here, Jane,' said he, both voice and manner heavy with warning, 'I have no wish to be hard wi' ye. In a way I'm sorry for ye; but I'll have no foolishness. You're welcome to your whims an' humours; but so long as you're my daughter you'll obey my word. Ye understand that?'

'I'll—I'll— I do, father.'

'Very well, then. It's as well ye do, for it'll save ye trouble. Now just do what I ask ye, me girl, an' save more words by gettin' rid of your nonsense there as ye stand. Ye hear me?'

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'I—I—' Again Jane declared herself: 'I 'll never marry him.'

'But that 's just what ye will do.' With a thump of his fist Hugh broke forth. 'I say ye will marry him. I say you 'll marry whoever I bid ye to marry. Who are you, miss, to dare put yourself against me? You an' your foolishness, an' your rebellion! You to stand there defyin' me! What d' you know of what 's good for ye? Is it for this I reared ye, and slaved for ye all these years? Be silent, miss!' stormed Hugh; then, in his masterful way, and in much the same words that lately he had flung at his spade, went on. He was master of that house. He would have no waywardness there, or foolishness, or rebellion. He had pitied Jane, had striven to show her kindness; now he was driven to wrath and plain speaking. Let her hear and beware. Let her put away folly and submit. Let her understand that so long as she dwelt under that roof she must show respect to him, and give the obedience that she owed. And for herself, let her guard against the sin involved in the breach of that commandment delivered to Moses on the Mount: *Honour thy father*

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and thy mother . . . ; and let her lay to heart that other command of the apostle: *Children, obey your parents in all things.* 'Ye hear me?' said Hugh, leaning flushed over the table. 'Ye hear an' understand?'

Jane stood a minute with her eyes on the Bible; then stepped nearer Hugh and looked at him, and dropped her hands. 'Father,' she said, 'always have I obeyed ye, an' honoured ye in all things; always have I been thankful to ye for all your goodness to me. I 'm thankful to ye now, an' I 'm wishful to obey ye, but how can I——?'

'Ye must!' stormed Hugh. 'I 'll make ye.'

Jane raised a hand. 'Hear me out,' she asked; 'it's little I have to say. How can I obey ye, father, when ye command me to do what's wrong? It is wrong—I know it is —ye know in your own heart it is. What happiness could there be? D'ye think——?'

'I think nothin',' cried Hugh. 'I say.'

Jane came a step nearer, again raised a pleading hand. 'Listen to me,' she asked. 'It's only a word. You 've quoted texts to me; don't ye mind that other passage in the Scrip-

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tures: *And they twain shall be one flesh . . .* D' ye think *we* could ever be one flesh?'

Hugh rose swiftly. 'Enough o' this,' he shouted. 'I mind nothin', an' I think nothin'. I ask ye this: are ye goin' to obey me?'

'Ah, don't, don't,' begged Jane. 'How can I? Listen to me, father.' With clasped hands she drew near to Hugh. 'Always to this day have we agreed together wi'out ever a hard word. I 've worked for ye night an' day; I 've strove to do me best. I want to obey ye. I want to honour ye—but— Ah, can't ye see?'

'I see just this,' said Hugh, 'that you'll obey me or leave this house. Not another word—not one!' He towered big and imperative over Jane, pointing towards the door. 'Go your ways an' purify your rebellious heart. Five weeks hence ye marry Martin Hynes, or you're no daughter o' mine. Go your ways.'

That was plain speaking; what might Jane, a poor weak woman striving to do right, without friend or place of refuge, dare answer to it? In sooth, nothing. Words were vain, pleas of no avail; all she might do was keep

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silent and endure, praying that strength to bear might be given her, hoping that all might be well in the end. She turned away without speaking, and with Hugh following her went back to the kitchen; there found her knitting, took a stool by the hearth, bent her head and worked in silence. All round her was life and cheerfulness: Hannah talking softly with Mires in a corner, her mother reading in a newspaper below the lamp, Big Ned roaring wisdom by the chimney-jamb, her father, relieved now of rod and toga, holding contest on high matters of State with Ned across the hearthstone: but Jane's thoughts were turned inwards, working dolefully with herself. When Ned made merry in her service, she looked up and smiled; if her mother spoke, or her father, she answered dutifully; sometimes when Hannah broke into laughter, and Mires rocked on his stool, she looked towards them and checked a sigh. Ah, it was well to be young and happy. What was in store? she asked herself. Could she endure? If she had patience, and asked help in prayer, maybe something might happen, all come right in the end. Ah, if she could believe in Martin, only

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think of him as she had once thought! But he had changed, everything had changed; she seemed alone in a pitiless world.

'God be with me,' prayed Jane; 'God help and strengthen me!' And so, long and fervently, she prayed that night by her bedside in her room beneath the thatch.

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CHAPTER VI

SO Jane endured patiently, and her life was hard. Time brought no consolation, the sweet spring days no happiness. She watched lonely with the stars, and went solitary amid the sunshine. Through long hours of the night she lay sleepless, longing and hoping, praying for help and strength, striving for patience and rest; down the long days she passed miserably, shrinking from companionship, scorning her impotent self, seeking relief from torturing thought in the weary monotony of toil. She worked incessantly. She never complained, seldom spoke. She forgot to smile or sing. Her appetite failed, her step grew listless. Life seemed dark, hope almost hopeless. Ah, that some light might shine, some way come plain!

But no light shone upon the way; no sign came in answer to her prayers. Only her own instincts—blind impulses of nature, monitions

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of conscience, subtle workings of tradition and training—guided her and upheld. None gave her counsel or sympathy, none understood: all were against her. She could only pray and endure. Her life was hard.

Her father troubled her little, and for that mercy she was grateful. There were no more scenes between them; and though he gave her no word of sympathy, no smallest sign of allegiance, his manner towards her was not less than kindly. He had spoken, but once for all; let obedience be given and his hand was light. Sometimes at table he checked Hannah's waspish tongue, sometimes silenced Maria with a word, or Mires with a look, or Ned the ponderous with an oath; now and then gave Jane a quiet look that stirred her heart. But these services came seldom, and all the day, whilst Hugh was afield, Hannah and Maria had Jane at their mercy; and did not spare her. For her good, and their own, they spoke; duty and inclination going hand in hand.

Hannah—a worthy girl in many ways, and by nature not unkindly—was an adept, as Sam Mires knew well, in the art of sly allusion, of

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talking at a victim; Maria, her mother, could wield her tongue with the stinging directness of a whip-lash. Both had gifts of speech, both were keen to sight opportunity: both beheld in Jane the choicest opportunity, the worthiest receiver of good gifts. *Some people never knew when the sun shone*, said Hannah. *God help the poor woman that lived to see children disgrace them!* came pat from Maria. *Sure it was well indeed for beggars to go choosing, particularly when there was only one choice*, quoth Hannah with a laugh. *Ah, God forgive her for bringing a fool into the world!* cried Maria, and snapped tight her lips. *Maybe the son of a Duke with a gilt coach and six white horses would suit some people*, hinted Hannah in a voice like honey. *Might Martin leave her to marry a beggar-man!* cried Maria in a flare of wrath. *Faith, and it was the blooming bride some one would make*, said Hannah with a titter, *herself and her rosebud of a face. Had she no sense?* cried Maria twenty times in a day. *Had she no gratitude? Was she a fool? Did she know what was before her? Had she never a word in her head?* 'Put down that work an' listen to me, ye ungrateful fool!'

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shrilled Maria across the kitchen, or through the sunshine. And Jane listened.

Neighbours also came thronging in, good-hearted souls from the Gorteen hills, laden with good wishes for herself, and little presents that smelt of peat smoke, and soft words of congratulation. Every day the knocker clattered on the green door, and Jane was summoned to the parlour, there to sit patiently with folded hands whilst Mrs. Hicks in poke bonnet and shawl, or Miss Phillips in jacket and hat, drew forth her gift and spread it on the table, asking Jane's acceptance of it in kindly words that she hated to hear. 'It's only a trifle, Miss Fallon,' would be the phrase, 'but God knows we're proud to give it. An' we wish ye well, an' long life in Hillside; an' may ye never see sorrow all your days.' And Jane would tremble where she sat, and murmur due thanks, whilst Hannah and Maria raised hands and joined in artful chorus of admiration. Sure it was lovely; sure it's Jane was the lucky girl; ah, now that was the finest present of all they'd seen. A thousand times they thanked Miss Phillips, a thousand times Jane was obliged. . . . 'Only

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ye mustn't be heedin' her,' would be Hannah's parting word at the door; 'sure she's flustered wi' all that's before her. Good-bye now, Miss Phillips, an' thank ye kindly again; an' we'll look for ye at the church.'

Every night, too, some one stamped the mud from his boots upon the step, and entered the kitchen, a 'God save ye kindly' on his lips, and a wedding-gift in his hand. Maybe it would be Long William from the Lough-head bringing two dozen of eggs for Herself; or Jack of the Hollow with some of the red cow's butter; or Henry Marvin of Lackan carrying a live goose below his arm; or John the cooper, with a wee stool for Miss Jane, 'an' might she have a hearth to sit by in Hillside till she was a hundred.' And there they would sit smoking and droning; and there would be Ned Noble booming through the smoke, there Mires whispering sweetly to Hannah in the corner, there Hugh considering, and Maria watching, and Jane between them bending meekly over her work. 'Ah, bedad, an' it's Herself is the lucky girl.' 'Sure ye might ha' knocked me down wi' a straw when I heard the news.' 'Man, but it's a great match

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entirely . . . an' when did ye say, ma'am, was the happy day?' 'Three weeks come Wednesday, please God,' would be Maria's answer; and Jane would wince at the words. Three weeks come Wednesday? Ah, no, no!

Also one morning Martin's mother came feebly through the garden between the rounded flower-beds, leaning heavily on her stick and with a packet in her hand, knocked at the green door and was led by the radiant Hannah up into the parlour. Here was an occasion! And how was Mrs. Hynes now? How all in Hillside? How Martin himself? They hadn't seen him this day or two, but sure he must be busy. Wouldn't Mrs. Hynes take off her bonnet? Ah, now, just to show she was at home! Well, then, she'd have a glass of port wine to refresh her after that long walk. Jane would be here in a minute, her mother was coming at once, let Mrs. Hynes take that easy-chair and make herself quite at home.

So Hannah chattered whilst the Mother smiled and sipped; soon Maria came beaming and bubbling, and Jane with her so pale and hesitant: and all was gay in the little parlour.

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Ah, delighted Maria was to see Mrs. Hynes, proud to see her so well and vigorous. And how was all at Hillside; and how was Martin himself? Why, a great honour he was doing them all; ah, a powerful surprise he had given them; sure it was Jane had the luck of a lady. They were delighted. Might the Almighty bless the match. It was great, cried Maria; it was great, echoed Hannah; it was great, cried both in endless chorus. But Jane sat meek and silent, having nothing real to say, and the Mother sat observant, thinking more than she said. Perhaps she understood; maybe she read deep in Jane's eyes. There was trouble there and fear, something that shrank from the light and cowered painfully in face of all this empty parade of laudation. What was her trouble? Why was she not happy? Had she also found out Martin? She rose and crossed to Jane. 'My dear,' she said, 'I hope you 'll be very happy with Martin, and happy with me. He has been a good son, and I know he 'll be a good husband. I 'll welcome you when you come very heartily and all your joys will be mine.' She laid her packet of old lace on Jane's lap, kissed her

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and turned away. 'Good-bye, my dear, and God bless you!'

Also Martin himself came dutifully almost every day, and, like Hugh, acted prudently. He made no professions of love, exacted none; never spoke to Jane of what was coming, or referred to what was past; took things as they were cheerfully (he having left all to Hugh and all being the best that could be), made the most of the sunshine and the best of himself. He was merry with Hannah, pleasant with Maria, cracked joke for joke with Big Ned, bowed his proud head in deference to the authoritative Hugh. Sometimes, of a morning, he would come with gun and dog to sit a while in the kitchen watching Jane at work; in the afternoons, too, would tramp in for a cup of tea and a word of gossip; at night also, now and then, would settle himself comfortably in a chair by the hearth, light his pipe and make gay discourse. He seemed happy, in those days, full of the spring. His face shone, his laugh rang through Gorteen. Ah, Martin was the boy, said one to another; the bright clever fellow. The sight of him did one's heart good. Who told better stories?

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Who met you with such hearty speech and ways? Why, to see him, one might imagine him matched with my Lady, worth her weight in gold! It was wonderful, ay and strange too, for wasn't Herself only poor Jane Fallon after all? Jane Fallon, going about like a ghost, they said, with never a word for herself and not two for Martin! What ailed her in life? Was she sick; or was the word true one heard about Martin not being to her mind? Ah, nonsense! Martin Hynes, that might pick the best in the land? Martin of Hillside; their own Squire; big handsome Martin? Ah, he was the boy of boys! Sure Jane had the luck of a Queen. See Himself there on his horse, there with his gun, there with his legs crossed before the fire. Every one liked him. Hannah knelt at his feet. Maria gave him all the affection of her withered heart. Red Hugh spared him some admiration and a shade of deference. Big Ned roared his praises from hill to hill. Sam Mires forgot Hannah, and neglected his whiskers as he sat beholding. Even Jane shone pleasantly, sometimes, in the light of his presence. He was such a fine man, so big and handsome, so hearty when he

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chose, so strong and masterful. It was hard to think ill of him, hard not to believe in him. If he were only true, always just as he then was—sunshine on his face, merriment in his eye, frankness in his voice. Was he true? Was this the real Martin, the Martin of the old days? Had he forgotten himself that night and spoken only with his breath? Did he truly care? Was it herself he came to see, or——?

Ah, she remembered. *Make it guineas and I'll take the heifer.* Not herself he wanted, but her money; not to please her he came and shone, but to humour her for the sake of the guineas. He was false. He cared nothing. All this was only show. Never would she marry him. She would go out among the strangers. She would die first. She would . . .

Ah, what could she do? Speaking were of no avail; nobody understood her, all were against her; she shrank from strange ways and places. Surely God would help her. Surely a way would come plain in the end. 'God guide me,' Jane would cry within herself, bending pale over her work and shutting out

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the light from her heart. And Martin would turn and see, would understand and turn darkly away, would rise soon and go. Then would Maria fume, Hannah gibe, Hugh proclaim silence; Jane herself glide silently away at last to her bedside beneath the thatch. And one night, he being reckless then and weary of Jane, Martin strode over the turf-bog to Leemore, hesitated a while in sight of the pillars and the darkened blind beyond them, then went boldly and took his old place by the fireside in the schoolhouse kitchen. Kate's mother welcomed him, but Kate, busy at a table with roll and ledger, gave him small heed; so in a while he rose, was dismissed by Kate with a curt good night, and came no more.

The days went, quick and sure, spring full in them, the nights glorious between; and quicker and nearer that day of days, so anticipated of all save Jane (and maybe one other), drew nigh. At the Fallons' all was bustle and excitement, in Gorteen commotion from end to end. Meekly Jane sat in the straight-backed pew, shrinking into herself as from the gaze of a countryside's eyes upon her, and heard read the banns between one *Martin Hynes*,

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bachelor, and another, *Jane Fallon, spinster, both of this parish*; meekly was led between those long lines of faces, ranged there among the tombstones, and heard her name go buzzing stealthily from porch to gate. She was taken to Bunn town, there to be shouted at, and shaken by the hand, and stared at by all the world upon the sidewalks; to stand patiently whilst the draper flattered and spread his wares, whilst Hannah chose and Maria criticised, whilst this one measured and that one fitted, and all joined in soft harmony of congratulation. Sure the grand match it was. Sure every one worshipped the Squire. Why, all the town had Herself on its tongue every minute of the day. Ah, lovely she'd look in that grey dress and bonnet with a white veil to her toes; ah, like an old glove that jacket fitted her and showed off her figure like something from Paris. 'God bless ye, Miss Jane!' cried the women from the doorways. 'Ah, more power to ye, me girl!' roared the men upon the sidewalks. 'May Heaven look kindly upon ye, me sweet young woman, an' may the Lord send your childer may be magistrates!' whined the beggars in the gutter. There were excursions

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to Lismahee, weary drives to the emporiums of Glann and Clogheen, long hours of trudging from street to street, of haggling at counter after counter. Some days seemed without beginning, so early the car went jolting through the mists; some endless, so tardily the hours went and the car lumbered home beneath the stars. But they went, those days, somehow, some way, and nearer came the appointed time.

Gorteen was agog; in the Fallons' a whirl of preparation. No time now for thought or worry; none to give heed to that simpleton of a Jane. The house was scrubbed and ordered. From sunrise to sunset Hugh went busily, whitewashing the walls, painting the doors and flower-boxes, trimming the hedges, bending over the walks and flower-beds. Maria baked and cooked, cleaned and arranged. Hannah plucked and trussed, sugared hams, watched cakes, piled coals about the ovens, starched and ironed; went radiantly of evenings to carry word to the fortunates who were bidden to the feast. Cutlery and linen were hired, chairs and tables borrowed from neighbours; wine and spirits came from Glann, beef and bags of

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biscuits and white bread. The rector sent a sugared cake; chickens came from Hillside; Hugh killed a sheep and hung it in the dairy. There was plenty of everything; all was ready; two days before the time the tables were spread in the parlour, decked and garnished.

Gorteen was eager; in the Fallons' excitement flared. Hannah flew on wings; Maria shrilled adown the hours; Hugh tramped light as a ploughboy. Only another day, only a handful of hours; just an hour or two more, said Jane within herself, going meekly through the flurry, preparing for the sacrifice. No one heeded her. She was prepared, everything was ready: now she might do her liking as best she liked. Let her mope and sigh; let her sit by the fire, pale and worn; let her spend lonely hours in the fields or nights by her bedside; she might pray her hardest, look her most piteous: all was ready and she was prepared. To-morrow Martin would come for his bride, and the bells ring, and her fate be sealed; to-morrow Jane be Jane no more. . . .

To-morrow? The last night? Ah, no!

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Surely something must happen, some way come plain—even now in the end. God was good. God would hear her. She would go. She would speak. . . . 'Ah, God help me,' cried Jane, that night, in piteous entreaty; 'God help me to do what is right! I 'm weak and foolish, hard and rebellious. If I have sinned, Lord forgive me my sins and show me that which is right.' She flung herself down, there in her room beneath the thatch with the candlelight dim in it and the stars looking through the window, there in sight of her dress hanging upon the wall and her bonnet and veil lying ready upon the chair; flung herself across the bed with outstretched arms. 'Help me, Lord,' she cried; 'direct me, O God most high!'

So that last night went; and the great day came. Very early all were astir in the Fallons'; as Gorteen awoke it yawned at the ceiling, and looking towards the windows, said: 'This is the Squire's weddin'-day. Happy is the bride that the sun shines on.' It was indeed a glorious morning. The sun sprang bright from the mists; the fields spread glittering upon the

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hills. Birds piped in the hedges. Life ran joyfully upon the earth. Away out across the wilds of Drumhill and back to the rampart of my Lord the mountain, this way towards smiling Emo, and that towards the valleys of Armoy, and down towards the wooded shores of Derryvad, beauty and freshness lay soft beneath the morning. The air was full and good. No cloud was in the sky. Slowly the smoke rose above the roofs and melted away.

By nine o'clock relations began to gather in the parlour, guests in yard and garden, and neighbours by the gateway in the road. Big Ned Noble came soonest of all, swaggering in a new suit and creaking boots, shouting his respects and offering kind services everywhere. On the first car came Eliza, Ned's wife, flounced and ribboned, sleek and radiant; young Ned driving gallantly from the dicky, young Nobles sitting stiff in Sunday best upon the cushions. Cousins and uncles drove in from Armoy, aunts and uncles from the loughside, cousins and kinsfolk from beyond the ferry, all bedecked and beaming, voluble and hearty, their hearts on their sleeves, their eyes kindling at sight of the tables. Such greetings

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and palaver, such handshaking and soothering, such airing of smoke-scented finery, fluttering of ribbons, tossing of wrinkled coat-tails! 'Sure it's an odious fine gathering entirely,' said those by the roadside. 'Sure, it's Ourselves are the best of the best,' thought the groups in the garden. 'Here's to Us all—an' good luck to Themselves!' shouted Big Ned in the parlour; and the glasses flashed.

All was life and bustle, laughter, excitement. Here went Hugh in his spring-sides and broadcloth, playing the host like my Lord. Here went Maria in her wrinkled satin, smirking and smiling, flurrying and sighing, one eye on the company and one on the tables. In and out, up and down, flew that whirlwind of a Hannah, now chattering in the parlour, or tittering in the hall, or straightening a ribbon before the glass; now stepping softly to Jane's door to listen a while; now giving Sam the lovelorn, so spick in his braided coat, white tie and lavender gloves, a tender word behind her hand.

Thus did time go and the hour of sacrifice come near.

The carriage from Bunn had just whirled up

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to the gate, some one upon the road had passed word that Himself was starting from Hillside; when downstairs Hannah came flying with news of Jane. 'She's gone—she's gone!' Excitedly Hannah rushed into the parlour waving uplifted hands. 'I can't find her. She's not in her room. Ah, has nobody seen her?'

Jane gone? A sudden hush fell upon the parlour; then quick a growing storm.

'It's true—it's true!' cried Hannah wildly. 'She's not there. She hasn't put on a stitch. Everything's just as it was last night. Ah, where is she? Lord above, where's Jane?'

Hannah's voice shrilled through the parlour, pierced to the garden, and woke agitation there. Faces came to the window, feet clattered in the hall; voices rose in the kitchen, hubbub in the yard.

'Go an' see!' cried Hannah. 'If ye don't believe me, go an' see for yourselves.'

Parlour and hall rushed to the stairs; with a burst Jane's room was taken by storm. There stood the bed in a corner, the varnished trunk by the window. There was Jane's Bible lying open upon the table, her dress hanging on a nail, her jacket folded upon a chair, her

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bonnet and veil, her shoes, her gloves; there was everything but Jane herself. Where was she? In Heaven's name, what had come to her? Back swept hall and parlour; loud rose the sound of clamour upon the stairs, swelled into kitchen and parlour, broke upon yard and garden.

'She's gone—she's gone,' shrilled Hannah. 'I know it. She's run away. She's drowned herself. She said she'd never marry him. There's been death in her face these weeks and weeks. Find her—find her! Ah, God above, don't stand there gapin', but go an' find her!'

Out ran Hannah; out rushed hall and parlour, spread through the yard and swarmed upon the fields. Shouts arose, and cries. Maria ran as one distracted, Ned Noble like a man pursued. Hugh flung off his coat, seized a pole and led the way towards the turf-bog. Mires went hunting along the ditches; aimlessly men and women coursed the fields. Dread blotted out the sunshine, fear panted in the face of spring.

'Jane, Jane,' was the cry. 'Jane Fallon—Jane Fallon!'

'Ah, Jane, dear, where are you?' cried

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Hannah in despair; then, by chance, turned through the haggard into the little garden plot and there found Jane bending low over a ridge.

A spade was in her hand. She was dressed in workaday garb, an old cap upon her head, her skirt tucked about her waist. Her face was pale and set; her eyes were fast upon the clay; her lips moved as she wrought: alone with thought and self she bent, a toil-worn figure of patience, there amid the sunshine. Had she found a way? Had strength come at last?

Hannah skirled high, plucked up her muslin skirts, ran, and took Jane by the arm. 'What's this? what's this? In God's name, what's possessed ye? Are ye mad, are ye mad? Come in with me. Ah, ye eternal fool, come in!'

Jane tightened her lips; bent lower above her spade.

Hannah shook her. 'They'll all be here in a minute. You'll be the talk of the world. You'll disgrace us, you'll disgrace us. Think of it! Never again can we raise our heads in Gorteen.' She seized Jane. 'Come with

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me. Ah, ye miserable fool! Come, I say, come.'

'I 'll never come.' Jane shook herself free, turned, and faced Hannah boldly. 'Tell them I 'll never come.'

'But ye must.' Hannah fell to pleading. 'Ah, Jane dear, Jane dear! Think of what you 're doin'. Think of mother—an' father—an' Martin . . .'

'Tell him that, God helpin' me, I 'll never marry him.'

'But ye must, ye must. It 's too late now. Ah,' cried Hannah, raising her hands and turning to the groups that came hurrying near, 'she 's mad, she 's mad! Look at her. Look at Martin's bride!'

Jane stooped and laid her spade in a furrow, then folded hands and bravely stood waiting. The groups ran in and formed a ring about her, protesting, pleading, imploring; at last came Hugh, broke through the ring, and gripped Jane's arm.

'What 's all this? What foolery are ye up to now? Answer,' thundered Hugh, 'answer me!'

'I 'll not go. I 'll never marry him.'

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Hugh stretched an arm towards the house. 'Go in an' dress yourself. March. Be ready inside fifteen minutes.'

'No, father.'

'Do as I bid ye.'

'No, father.'

'D' ye want me to raise a scene? Haven't ye disgraced yourself enough? D' ye dare to defy me? Me! Quick; in wi' ye.'

'No, father—wi' God's help, no!'

Hugh flared into fury. With both hands he seized Jane and began pulling her towards the house; and with that the ring parted again and Martin strode in, all glorious in his wedding array. Stepping forward he took Hugh by the arm.

'What 's all this? Stand back, Fallon. Let her go, I say.' Hugh stood aside, and there was Martin, so big and glorious, face to face with his bride. 'What 's this, Jane? Why are you not ready for me? Did you forget, or am I come too soon?' He took Jane's hands and drew her towards him. 'Come,' said he, 'it 's time to go. Come, Jane, my girl.'

Jane shook her head and moaned; quivering, she tried to draw away.

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'Come, Jane.' Masterfully Martin's hands gripped and claimed. 'Come with me.'

Then Jane raised her eyes, a sob in her throat, and her lips prayerless; lifted her eyes, and at sight of Hynes, his manhood and glory, she lost strength and she gave herself to him.

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CHAPTER VII

ALL was well, then, at last; good humour restored, diversion sure. The sun was shining again, spring triumphant in the world. Laughing and chattering, the groups tramped back to hall and parlour; comforted themselves with something warm, and made ready to start. The cars clattered out and took their places between the hedges. Hall and parlour, yard and kitchen, trooped forth and filled the cars. Here stood the carriage by the gateway, the horses beribboned and sleepy, Tom Logan airing his buttons upon the box; there was Martin's gig; there the crowd of gaping rustics. All was ready. All the world stood waiting. Let the bride appear.

A sound of feet upon the stairs, a sudden hush of expectancy in the roadway, a pause in the hall; then the figure of Jane by the threshold, and her coming, slowly and steadily, with Hannah beside her, and Maria weeping

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behind and Martin and Mires following after, down the pathway, along through the sunshine. She has flowers in her hand, a spray in her hair; all about her hangs the long white veil, in and out go the satin shoes beneath her dress of silver-grey. Her face is pale, her eyes fixed upon the path; but her step is firm, her look steadfast. She has no doubts now. For weal or woe the die is cast. Blessed, thrice blessed, is the bride that the sun shines upon.

The crowd parts and hustles back by the gateway. Bravely, and meeting the fire of good wishes with a smile, Jane takes her place in the carriage, with Hannah beside her, and the weeping Maria on the further seat. Mires closes the door, climbs into Martin's gig, and gives the word to start. Crack go the whips; the roadway shouts good luck and safe return; off goes the long procession between the green-flecked hedges. Long life, Miss Jane. God be with you, our gallant Squire. Happy be the couple that the sun shines upon.

At Hillside gate is a little party: Mary the servant in her Sunday dress, George the boy in holiday tweeds, a labourer or two grinning their broadest, the Widow also in cloak and

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bonnet standing feeble by the wall. As the carriage passes hats and hands are waved, and the Widow nods and smiles; as Martin passes, high and glorious up there in his gig, a cheer rises in his honour, and his mother sends him greeting through her tears. Welcome back, sir; welcome back. Oh, happy may you be, my own boy Martin!

There are kindly groups here and there on the roadside. From the fields now and then comes a lusty cheer. Children skirl in the gateways, women flutter aprons in the doorways. Here an ancient sits sunning by a hedge and mumbling as from the graveside; there a crone stands doubled in hood and cloak by a gap, her tongue wagging grave comment. Ah, well to be young and merry; good not to know what God in His wisdom has in store. Make haste to the wedding. Hurry on through the blessed sunshine.

By the cross-roads a little crowd has gathered—boys and girls from Armoy and Lackan, wild men with red beards and fierce-eyed women from the bogs of Gort, the postman from Bunn in his donkey-cart, Mrs. Brady from the shop beyond, the Nolans of Leemore

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on their way to Bunn with turf—and lining the roadside like some tattered company of scarecrows, give knowing heed to all this parade of grandeur that winds up the brae. A carriage, indeed. A veil and flowers, no less. Gloves and a high hat on Himself; gloves and cigar with his Highness, Sam the Hump; ribbons and fallals fluttering on all the relations. Ah, by the powers, but it 's great entirely! Ah, by all that 's high, if this isn't wonderful to the world! Jane Fallon in her carriage! Martin the Squire behind his high-stepper! And who's paying the Piper, now? Would it be Martin? Would it be Red Hugh? And, listen now: is it money or beauty that the Squire 's marrying?

Outside Ned Noble's, a cluster of True Blues discourse a quickstep on fife and drum and wake enthusiasm along the procession. By his gate Father Tom stands portly, and blesses the company with word and smile. There are well-wishers on the Priest's brae; a flag droops across the hedge in front of Lunny's cottage; a cart filled with boisterous turf-cutters stands in the mouth of Gorteen bog; in the flats that stretch below Leemore hill men cheer in the furrows or drop their spades

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and run to the hedges. Uphill goes the long procession, the horses panting as they wind, the drivers bent forward towards the shafts; and there on top stands Kate Trant by the school gateway, in the midst of her bright-eyed flock. The children shout and clamour; but Kate stands silent among them, hands clasped behind her, face set and pale, her lips tight. She had dreamt once of a happening like this; had seen herself in veil and bonnet seated happily in a carriage, with her Martin big and glorious in his gig and the cars winding far behind. Now she dreams no more. Another sits in the carriage and wears her veil. There goes Martin, hers no longer, whirling past with a laugh and a flourish, leaving her lonely on the roadside, going out of her dreams for ever. There go the cars. . . . Let them go. What matters it all? Maybe fate is kind. Perhaps flowers might spring even by the roadside. Might she be happy. Might he never regret. Come, children, come.

On along the broad road, stretching away like a grey river between shining banks of green; past Cussy's shop and Dunn's forge standing back from the crossways, past wide

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tracts of bogland thick with merry turf-cutters, fields new from the spade, hills crouching above the valleys, cottages gleaming among the poplars: on towards the long bare mountain, through the wilds of Drumhill, so barren of all save beauty this morning, goes the procession, hastening gaily to the wedding. Some sing, the women chatter and laugh, the men shout greetings across the hedges or jests from car to car. Red Hugh is hearty, Martin buoyant; in the carriage Jane sits looking through the window, thinking her own thoughts and nodding response sometimes to Maria's prosing or Hannah's twittering. No need to advise, none to fear. The past is buried. For weal or woe she has made the great step, set her feet upon the long path from which there is no turning. She must not falter. Come what may she must do her duty. Till death, and beyond death, she belongs now, body and soul, to another. Might God be with her; might His hand bless and direct.

There are stragglers by the church gate, loiterers among the tombstones right and left of the path, inquisitive groups in the big square porch; as the party goes up along the aisle

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there is commotion in the pews and a sound of eager whispering. Why, she is not in white, and her veil is only gauze. Satin shoes, no less, and flowers in her hair. Sure she 's flustered, the body; and her thirty if she 's a day. Now the bit of a thing she is, hardly as high as the Squire's elbow. Ah, but doesn't Himself look grand in his long coat and gloves. The fine man he is; the fine man! Sure it 's the world's wonder to think of him choosing *her*. And, for pity's sake, look at Hannah, linked with Sam the Hump, and her blushing as if 'twas herself was a-marrying! Look at Sam's tie—look, look—*and* the lavender gloves, *and* the shiny shoes. Cast your eye on Maria's ould satin that was her grandmother's; and sure it 's a pure sight that Hugh looks in his wrinkled broadcloth. Ah, now, now. Dear, oh dear. . . . Whisht; here 's his Riverence.

A hush falls among the pews. Feet clatter along the aisle, seats creak, prayer-books rustle. The harmonium makes joyful sound; Wilson the clerk wipes his spectacles and coughs behind his hand. Side by side Jane and Martin take their places before the altar rail; and, 'in the sight of God and in the

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face of this congregation,' the time-worn rite begins.

'*I require and charge you both*,' go the searching words; slowly and impressively come the solemn questions:

'*Wilt thou have this woman? . . . Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour, and keep her in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all other, keep thee only unto her?*

'*Wilt thou have this man? . . . Wilt thou obey him, and serve him, love, honour, and keep him in sickness and in health . . . so long as ye both shall live?*'

Wilt thou? 'I will,' answers Martin, boldly as to a listening world.

Wilt thou? 'I will,' answers Jane, timidly as to her trembling self, yet with the certainty of all her heart; then gives her hand to Martin, takes his ring upon her finger, kneels by him and implores the blessing of the Eternal. Might they be as Isaac and Rebecca. Might these joined hands never be put asunder. Might the Lord with His favour look upon them. 'O Lord, save Thy handmaid,' prays Jane, there by Martin's side, her head bowed low and the sunshine soft upon

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it through the chancel window. 'I am weak, make me strong. Help me to keep my vow, to be good and brave. Give me patience,' pleads Jane, bowed down as before the Throne; then rises and like a child receives the words of admonishment. She is calm now and possessed, filled with strength and content. The vigil is past; the vow made. Her hands are folded, her eyes raised; upon her face is a strange light, not of the sunshine, not even of happiness, but a sweet radiation from within. Often in the earlier untroubled days, you might have seen that serenity on Jane's face; as she sat teaching in the Sabbath-school, as she listened to the Word in some dingy parlour, as she went singing about her work; now it is shining again with a new and purer light, clear there for all who have eyes to see. The Rector sees as he stands admonishing. One here and there in the pews and a few among the tombstones—a woman who knows, a man who remembers, a maiden who believes —catch the light and stand rapt in reverie, as slowly Jane goes down the aisle and out into the sunshine, out into the world with her hand in Martin's arm. Maria sees through

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a mist of tears, Hannah through wreathing smiles. Even Hugh is not blind this morning; and Martin, seated now by Jane on the way towards home, looks upon her wonderingly.

'Why, Jane,' he says, a vibrant note sounding in his voice, 'you're changed, my girl. You look—what is it? Why, you're ten years younger inside an hour.'

'Am I, Martin?' Jane smiles and turns. 'What, ten years?'

'Ay, every day of them. Look at me, Jane; keep on looking. Never heed the fields and hedges now. Tell me—tell me, Jane; are you happy?'

'Happy?' Jane sighs a little. 'Ah, yes—I 'm happy.'

'But why do you sigh, Jane? Look at me—look at me. Aren't you content?'

'I am, Martin; indeed I am.'

'You 're sure?'

'I 'm sure, Martin.'

'And—listen, Jane. You forgive me, don't you? You forget all that foolishness?'

'All 's gone, Martin—all 's gone.'

'Thank God for that!' Martin sits silent a while, his eyes on the flying hedges; then

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turns again. 'And we'll be happy together, Jane—the two of us—won't we?'

'Please God we will, Martin.'

'No, but say we will; say you're sure we will.'

'Please God—' Jane hesitates; turns and lays her hand on Martin's. 'Oh, I'm sure we will—I'm certain sure.'

'That's right.' Again Martin sits pondering; again looks round. 'I'll do my best, Jane. God knows I'm not worthy of you. I'm full of faults. I treated you——'

'All that's past, Martin.'

'I'll do my best, Jane.'

'Best can do no more, Martin.'

'And you'll help me, Jane?'

'Oh, help!' Jane's voice quavers and breaks. 'Martin, dear, I'll always be with you—always—always.' And her hand rests fast in his.

Homeward goes the wedding-party—homeward to feast and revelry, on and speedily past hill and hedgerow. The sun rises high; away and away stretch the crowding fields back towards bog and mountain. The cars straggle far along the road, this one racing that, passing

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and repassing, whirling and rattling, all striving vainly in chase of the bride. Up hill and down dale they go, whips cracking, drivers shouting, hooves pounding, natives skirling by hedge and furrow. In Moran's hollow a rope is stretched from ditch to ditch, and the cars draw nearer as Martin pays toll. At Leemore bog the turf-cutters stop the horses and clamour for sixpences and a scramble. Before the school a line of children stands across the road, leaping in the dust and holding caps and aprons for gifts of pennies; the mistress not now among them, but peering forth sad-eyed maybe beyond the pillars. There is another rope across the Priest's brae; another clamouring party in fantastic tatters by the cross-roads. From Hillside gateway comes a shower of rice and a lucky shoe, and by it Martin's mother stands arrayed, given back from the Long-ago, you might fancy, a relic of withered times in her flowing black silk, netted lace shawl, gold brooch and widow's cap. The carriage stops, Martin helps her into his place and mounts beside Tim Logan. The cars close up, the hedges fly past. There is the Lough-head, there the pastures of Gorteen,

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there the neighbours waiting; there the gateway at last and the green door beyond the narrow path. Home once more. Welcome back, Mrs. Martin. Hurrah for our own Squire boy. Hurrah for ourselves and everybody. Blessed be the couple that the sun has shone upon.

And now for diversion. 'Sure as a gun me ribs are rattlin',' said one to another, and plucking at slack waistbands tramped in to their places. Feet shuffled, chairs creaked; knives and forks stood ready for play. Never before in Gorteen was seen such a gathering; so big, so distinguished and ready. To this day folk keep green their memory of Jane Fallon's wedding-party, with eyes turned backward through long years upon piled plates, and groaning tables, and eager faces above them. Maria found fame that day, Hugh a glory unfading. It was great. The parlour was crowded to the door, so that hardly might the bride have breathing-space in the cupboard corner, or a man stretch a leg without kicking a neighbour, or Sam Mires reach a hand to his whiskers, or the carvers have elbow-room; and so great a company faced Big Ned at the

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kitchen-table that, in a while, two couples carried their plates and ate by the hearth.

'Still the closer the warmer,' said Susan to John. 'An' the tighter the safer,' answered John with a grin.

'The more the merrier,' said Red Hugh, striving hard with a turkey. 'An' the fewer the quicker,' quoth Black Tom of the mill.

'Plenty to give, an' plenty to have,' shouted Big Ned, slashing deep at a ham; 'an' thank Heaven, childer, ye have a man at the weapons.'

No time was wasted, little ceremony observed. Hunger needed no sauce that day, man or maiden no bidding. Quick and heavy the plates went out; quick and sure came back ready for more.

'Dear knows, I'm keener than ever,' said James of the shop (a creditor of Martin's, be it said), and passed for a third helping; 'just a trifle o' beef, Martin, me boy, an' don't spare the fat.'

'Ah, now, but that chicken's great,' sighed Tom's Mary in the corner; then loosened her waistband and passed for turkey.

'Well, bad manners to me for a glutton,'

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was the word with Red Robin (himself from the hungry Loughside beyond); 'but, dang me, ma'am, if I haven't a longin' for some o' that pie o' yours!'

Like heroes Hugh and Martin wrought at the dishes, like a Trojan Ned handled his weapons in the kitchen; hot and hearty the guests sat packed around the tables, striving like troopers. None minded his neighbour, none gave heed to anything save the work before him or the task that was coming. It was a revel, a riot of appetite. Only seldom in a lifetime did such chances come: now a chance was here, my sons—was here—was here. The clatter of knife and fork, the pop of cork and jingle of glass, the sound of good humour, the sigh of content, uprose harmoniously, swelled out through door and window, and set hungry eyes gleaming beyond the hedge.

'How's all with ye above there?' shouted Big Ned from the kitchen. 'Ah, the best in life,' answered Red Robin; 'lashin's for everybody, an' all strivin'.'

'Good man, Ned,' called James of the shop; 'if ye want help mind I'm with ye.' 'I'm

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obliged to ye, James,' was Ned's retort, quick as the kick of a mule; 'but it 's every rogue to his own counter this day.' And the rafters rang.

Indeed it was a merry time. Humour rolled from chair to chair, wit flashed along the tables.

'Good health to your Ladyship, there below the wag o' the wall,' said one and another, raising glass to Jane.

'Long life to your big self,' was the word to Martin; 'an' may your next spree be a christenin'.'

'Good luck and long life,' was Hugh's greeting to the Widow, sitting patient there in her silk and lace. 'Ma'am, I wish ye well.'

'Here 's to yourself, Sam, me boy,' cried Long John, raising high a bumper; 'an' may Hannah, at your elbow, trim your whiskers before the corn is straw.'

'Hugh, me hero,' spake Tom of the mill, his face shining like a peony, 'I 'm lookin' your way. Fill up and drink to ourselves, an' Maria that owns ye; an' may fifty years see ye straight in your boots.'

'*To the glorious, pious, and 'mortial memory*,'

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shouted Red Robin in a fervour, wheeling in his chair, and raising a hand towards King William seated high on his charger above the mantel. '*Long may ye reign, me boy!*' And from parlour to kitchen rolled loud the True Blue chorus: '*Here's to King Billy—and croppies lie down!*'

The knives clattered down, decanters passed; then a hush fell upon the room as, from his place between Jane and Hannah, Sam Mires rose to give a toast. 'Good man, Sam,' spake Red Robin for the parlour; 'Give it tongue, Sam,' spoke Big Ned for the kitchen, gathered now by the doorway and outside the open window: and Samuel plucked at a whisker, thrust a hand into his flowered waistcoat, coughed politely, and began.

He did well. Soft words fell from his tongue like leaves from a bough, compliments flowed like wine; he was suave and subtle, humorous and witty, fluent as milk, polished as a new button. The men sat applauding, the women smirking and blushing. Jane was overwhelmed, Martin crowned in glory. Maria's old satin became a robe of poplin, Hugh's wrinkled broadcloth clad the limbs

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of a coming magistrate. To hear Samuel one might fancy all the beauty and virtue, the worth and intellect, of Ireland gathered within sound of his voice. He made parish history that day; still within the bounds of Gorteen his words do live; and just here one phrase of his that afterwards became a byword in the land must be given immortality.

He had crowned the company, had come down to earth from the realms of fancy; at last had turned from folly, and was smiling upon Jane. Could mortal man, asked Samuel, spreading wide his hands, find words large enough, or good, or worthy, to fit her merits? She was a saint. Goodness and purity sat upon her head. The whole world you might search nor find another her equal, so simple and sweet, so meek and patient, so completely good. 'When I saw her this morning,' quoth Samuel, speaking now with all conviction, 'walking up the aisle before me in her white veil; when I saw her kneeling before the altar; when I saw her step out into the sunshine beaming upon her husband's arm—then I thought of that little flower which not long ago we saw in the fields, I thought of a snowdrop. . . .

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A snowdrop? Is there need to follow Samuel one word further on his happy way? Surely he has done passing well, and can now glide back into the shadows, leaving us with Jane. A snowdrop? Cannot you see Jane now quite clearly, sitting there beneath the clock, blushing and shrinking, her eyes lowered or raised a moment to glance towards Martin, her head bowed and that light again upon her face? Can you not see her in veil and gown, flowers in her hand, a spray in her hair; or seated by Martin's side whirling through the sunshine, or going with him towards Hill-side in the shades of evening and crossing the threshold of her new home? Can you not see her now as really she was, and not in that her wedding-day only but in all her days?

A snowdrop? You have but to picture one and you image Jane's life, to look at one and see her face. And, hereafter, should you care to think of her as *Snowdrop Jane*, and to call her that, you will be giving her the name which, through the good services of Sam Mires (and for those may Hannah always treat him kindly), clung to her in Gorteen and

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around Gorteen, onwards from her wedding-day through life. *Snowdrop Jane. Jane the Snowdrop.* So people used to call her, and still do call; speaking soberly and ever kindly.

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CHAPTER VIII

THE honeymoon was spent at Hillside. Some day, when affairs were settled, when work had lightened and the days grown long, Martin was to take Jane out into the world—for a week in Dublin, or a fortnight at the seaside; but just now such delights must lie in wait. Not indeed that Jane cared, or Martin, not that home was the worst place in the world or fuller happiness to be found away from it; not that anything mattered, for hardly had Martin bidden Jane welcome to her new home and his mother kissed her in the hall, when the heavens opened and there was great rain. All those glad spring days were blotted out behind mist and gloom. Through long days it poured unweariedly, so that the mountain was hidden away and the sky, nor had the nights any stars within them. Through a whole week Jane never crossed the threshold; not even on Sunday to church or

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preaching, where friends sat eager for sight of her blushes and longing for sight of her new dress. Hannah and Maria came to see her through murk and mud; Hugh stamped in with a streaming hat; Martin drove off gaily of mornings, this way towards Bunn or that towards Lismahee in search of creditors, and came home soaked: it was just as though the deluge had come between the new life and the old, cut them apart and imprisoned Jane within the pleasant bounds of home. The world was pushed back. Old times and things seemed far away. Everywhere and always were the new delightful things of her new life.

They were indeed delightful and good, these new things; the change from old to new was wonderful. Yesterday she had been a slave, to-day she was free; there stood Jane Fallon, a toil-worn nobody, here sat Jane Hynes, mistress of Hillside, wife of Martin. *Then* was hard, comfortless, cheerless; *now* was warm, pleasant, easy, almost too good to endure. She was very happy. From morning to night her face shone. Rising she prayed God that to-day might be as yesterday; lying down she thanked God for His bounty and

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prayed that to-morrow might be as to-day. Everything was so new and strange. Martin was kindness and love itself; his mother a lesson in goodness. How pleasant to hear Mary call her Mistress, to see James come shambling to do her bidding, to sit at head of the table pouring tea into real china, to take lessons from the Mother in the art of housewifery, to go softly from room to room, all wonder and admiration, to stand on her own hearth, sit by her own work-basket, to receive Maria in her own parlour and show Hannah her own wardrobe, to be Jane Hynes, Martin's wife, mistress of Hillside. She felt glad as a child in the midst of new toys, proud as a child stepping decked in a new dress. Everything was so fresh and delightful; every one so very good. The change was great. In a day she had found another world. Back there, beyond the rain, was Jane Fallon, toiling in quilted petticoat and linsey bodice, eating silently by a bare table, knitting soberly by an untidy hearth, resting in a little room below the thatch; here, shut in from cold and wet, was Jane Hynes, moving from room to room in a flowing dress, rings on her finger, a brooch

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at her throat, sitting by well-spread tables with Martin laughing before her and the Mother smiling at her side, resting when she liked, doing what she would, listening to the soft fall of the rain at last as she lay in a great room that looked upon the lawn. Had she ever lived till now? Had youth come back to her within a single day? Was she the same woman, the Jane that had wept so much, prayed so earnestly for deliverance? Ah, she had been headstrong and sinful. God knew best. Life was just beginning. Away before her stretched long years of happiness, long full years, bright summers, cosy winters, Martin and she going blessedly through them, together always and hand in hand. . . .

Ah, that it might be so, thought Jane, her old self reasserting itself as she sat one night by the parlour fire, with Martin reading near the lamp and the Mother knitting in a corner; that God might grant it to be always so. Even if trouble came, even if days fell dark, might they still keep constant upon the long path. All was pleasant going now, sunshine upon it everywhere; but maybe rough places were in front, stones and pits and thorns. She must

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guard against pride of heart; she must be wise and sober-minded, must train herself and help Martin. All the glories of the world were as nothing if darkness lay within. Always she must pray for strength and guidance, must watch and pray. Yes; she must kneel and humble herself, thought Jane; and silently sat reading the fire, hands folded upon her lap. Her lips moved. Her face was grave and set. The Mother glanced at her from time to time; rose presently, said good night and went. Martin put down his newspaper, looked steadily at Jane's face for a minute; then leant forward.

'Jane.'

She raised her eyes, smiling as she spoke. 'Yes, Martin.'

'What's the matter?'

'Matter? Nothing. Why d' you ask, Martin?'

'You're so solemn. You look like you used to when . . . What's troublin' you now, Jane?'

Her face fell grave again. She paused for a breath. 'Nothing, Martin; nothing at all. I was only——'

'What, Jane?'

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'Only thinkin' that maybe I was too happy —that everything is too good—that maybe I was gettin' too proud and was forgettin' to——'

'Yes?' Martin leant forward. 'Forgettin' what, Jane?'

'To say my prayers, Martin.'

He turned his eyes upon the fire; sat mute awhile; then rose and faced the lamp, with his hands clasped behind him. 'I know.' He looked down upon Jane. 'What can prayers do?' he asked, not mockingly but inquiringly.

'Do?' Jane raised her face. 'Oh, everything, Martin; everything. Without them we can do nothing. If we forget them we forget God; if we forget God we are lost.'

'Hm.' Martin poised on heel and toe. 'Well,' he said at last, 'maybe so; maybe so. Anyway, they can do no harm. Only—' He paused.

Jane looked at him, quick and eagerly. 'Only what, Martin?' she asked, dread lurking in her voice. 'Surely ye know; surely ye know!'

'I like the other face best, Jane,' said Martin, smiling down upon her.

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'The other face?' Jane was puzzled. 'What face, Martin?'

'Why, the face I've seen this last fortnight, not the one you're wearin' now.'

'Ah!' Now Jane understood. She looked up, smiling also. 'Ah, yes, Martin; I know, I know. But it's just to keep that face that I must pray and pray. I want to keep it. I want to be happy always. I want you to be always as you are, an' myself always as I am, an' everything just as it is. An' I will—I will—only God must help me.'

'Yes . . . yes.' Martin nodded at the lamp. 'An' can I do nothing?' he asked.

'Oh, everything, Martin—with God's help.'

'Yes . . . yes. . . . Well, maybe so. All I know is that I like the other face best. Keep that, and I'm satisfied.' He swung round upon the hearth, big and strong and radiant. 'Come, Jane; where is it? Let's see it, girl. Don't let the rain have everything its own way to-night. Look up, Jane—look up.'

And Jane showed him the old face.

Nevertheless, for long enough that night, her prayers went up through the rain in supplication and thanks.

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Then the rain ceased, the sun shone again and called men to toil. No time now for dallying by table or fireside; no excuse now for heavy heads and lazy bones; the land was calling; sun and wind, long days and mellow nights, claimed all endeavour; work must march. The country sprang into life, radiant and beautiful, new-born of rain and the quickening spring. Spades flashed in the valleys; men and women bent among the furrows; the shouts of the turf-cutters rose among the heather. In Gorteen was day-long bustle of fierce striving; in the wilds without, on bleak Drumhill and barren Armoy, much patient toiling with adversity; in Hillside a stir of work that gave promise of good things.

Now that creditors were satisfied, the land free and himself quit of ignoble cares, Martin seemed changed into a new man. He loitered less and worked more, thought more and laughed less. Only seldom now did he go a-pleasuring; in fairs he was all business, in markets not often seen. From his hunter he parted willingly. He tightened his hand and closed his pocket. A score of plans for making money he made and tried. Often might you

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see him and Hugh Fallon making wise survey of flocks and fields. Early and late he was out, working sometimes, ordering and planning always. Hardly now could Jane tempt him to sit through a meal, or wait to read prayers of a morning, or give her a quiet hour of talk at night when the Mother had gone and the house was quiet. He had no time for dallying. Spring was going, summer just here; when winter came he would sit all day. 'Wait, Jane,' he said, turning for his hat; 'just wait till the throng is over. Then we 'll have sprees —off to Dublin for a week, or away to Kyle for a fortnight. . . . Good-bye till dinner-time, girl; good-bye.'

So Martin toiled and planned; and Jane turned face—her new face that Martin had scarce time to see—upon her own affairs. She was quite content, fully happy. She liked to see Martin busy, was glad to hear the Mother's word of wonder at the change upon him; for herself wished no better than present happenings—sweet outside happenings of summer-time most of all. Fondly she loved her home, so clean and ordered, so full of light and cheerfulness; easy to spend whole days and

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weeks of rain just there: impossible to see sunlight full in the world and not long to have share in it. Low ceilings and carpeted floors, dim corners and lurking shadows, flowers peeping through netted curtains, books, pictures; these were well and good: but give her always, as better and more satisfying, broad fields and long green hedges, sunshine and blue sky, the wind sobbing in the trees, birds to hear, a garden to weed. In the house she was content, without it was happy; so all her life it had been with her, and so even now it was. Her instincts were pastoral rather than domestic, and these, through time and circumstance, so established within her, that no striving on her part, even had she wished to strive, was likely to effect much change. Perhaps time might tell, as usually it does tell; but, Jane being Jane, and her years being many, small prospect was there of time working wonders upon her.

All of which, before many days, the Mother discovered and knew; some of which, one day or another, Martin the Squire was sure to discern.

Of those long spring days, therefore, and

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longer days that followed of heartsome summer-time, Jane spent no greater part within dull walls than merest duty demanded. Often before the sun had scattered the mists, sometimes even before Martin had shaken off sleep and stepped out yawning, she was up and out, feeding the poultry, working in dairy or garden, tramping through the dew-wet fields, skirt tucked high, an old straw hat on her head, to find and drive home the cows. Occasionally, when the humour served or help was scarce, she took noggin and stool into the byre and helped with the milking; always she tested the cream, gave heed to the churning, and made the butter with her own hands. It was she who collected the eggs, oiled and laid them in rows on the pantry shelf. Her *chuck-chuck*, rising shrill within the yard, brought the fowls flying to breakfast with outstretched necks; her *wheet-wheet* set the ducks croaking upon the drinking-pool and drew them waddling to her skirts in long procession. Sometimes she measured oats for the horses, or carried milk to the calves, or mixed white drinks for the cows, or raided the carrot pit on behalf of Neddy. If a beast fell sick, Jane

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tended it night and day, as tender of voice and hand as a mother of children. She sowed peas and beans in the garden, hoed and dug, watered and sprayed, trained plum-trees upon the wall, set scarecrows among the ridges. If Mary was slow at the washtub, the Mistress came helping. If James was wanted in the fields, the Mistress took whip and reins and followed Robin behind the churn-shaft, singing happily as she trudged. No drudgery came amiss. She only laughed when the Mother, in her gentle way of admonishing, suggested that maybe washing and churning made unworthy occupation for the mistress of Hillside. What might the neighbours think? What respect could Mary have for a mistress who wore coarse aprons and worked in the yard? What would Martin say, when he came to see; Martin who was so particular, who liked to see white hands and dainty shoes, who wished his wife to be better than another?

'You know, dear, men notice these things. Even if they are rough and untidy in themselves, yet they like their wives to look fresh and dainty. Not that you are doing wrong, Jane—of course not, dear, and you mustn't

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think me unkind . . . but maybe it were wise just to think over what I say.'

And Jane would look very grave, would take off hat and coarse apron and go bustling through the rooms; would watch the sunlight through door and windows for maybe a whole long day, then would creep out for an hour, for two hours mayhap, for every hour at last that she could steal. Those beautiful days, with sun and wind quick in them, the sky so blue above, the earth so pleasant beneath, how could she resist them? They called her, drew her irresistibly. The cool shadows of the trees, the long stretch out and away of brooding fields, the hills crowding back towards the long dim mountain, the walled lane where ferns clung between moss-grown stones, the banks where wild strawberries peeped below the white-thorn, the valley one blaze of dandelion and purpling heather, the deep black pools among the willow clumps in which one's face lay deep, the lake shining like a burnished mirror within its marge of bulrushes, gnats whirring, butterflies flitting, birds singing, carts clanking, dogs barking, the smell of fresh earth, of luscious meadowsweet, of fragrant hay: could she let the

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days go by and miss all these? She could not. See and feel them she must, if not always, then often and long as she might. They were part of her life. She loved them and never knew why.

Every fine day, then (and happily the season was good that year), saw Jane blessing some part of it with sight of her face. Near eleven o'clock you might find her crossing the fields, carrying lunch to Martin and James in a varnished basket; nearing twelve and dinner-time you saw her hurrying back, ferns or flowers in the basket, her apron filled with stones for the rockery or nettletops for the chickens, clay on her boots, hands scratched, hat awry. Between four o'clock and five you saw her setting forth again, fresh now and gay in beribboned hat and flowered cotton dress, in this hand a great basket, in that a shining can; saw her wend across hill and hollow, along lane and pathway, come to corn-field or meadow, seat herself by a hedge and there serve tea and brown bread and butter to a sprawling ring of workers. There would be a while of silence, then a while of chatter and laughter; then a sound of toil once more, of scythe or reaper, of jingling traces, of whip

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and shout, that rose and continued till night had come. You saw Martin go big and lusty across the stubble; saw Jane bending over a swathe, or swinging a rake, or stooking sheaves, or carrying armfuls of crackling hay, or twisting ropes, or turning to watch Martin as he toiled. This was what Jane enjoyed, this made fitting close to any glorious day. How good to have the sunshine beating hot, the air so pure and large, so full of the softness and fragrance of summer; to see the bounty of yellow corn, the clean sweep of gathered meadow, the bronzed workers hurrying and striving; to feel glad and contented oneself, the world so hopeful, life so joyous, her Martin out there so commanding.

Her Martin? He was such a fine man. She rejoiced in his strength, in his comely vigour. He towered as a giant among the rest, sunburnt and masterful. No one dared to thwart him. His word was law. Even in anger, when James was clumsy or a horse stubborn, his shout moved her blood. To see him raise an arm in quick command, to see him leaning upon a rake, pondering and planning, to see his great brown arms, his swelling muscles, his

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swinging stride, to hear him shout and laugh, to have just a word from him as they stood among the swathes; such hearing and seeing worked admiration in Jane, full and generous. Her Martin? So fortunate she was. See him now . . . and now! What if he gave her no more than a word, seldom glanced at her face? What if he sat silent through a meal sometimes, or dropped asleep of evenings in his chair? What if they rode sometimes from Drumhill to Armoy, or walked to preaching from Hillside to Leemore, and never exchanged a word? Words were not necessary, nor looks. His mind was busy with plans and affairs. He was weary at night, in haste at table. Just now work was everything, long constant work in face of the sun. She must be wise. She must be content to stand and admire, to wait patiently in full surety of her own happiness and of Martin's love. Soon, in a month or more, work would be over and Martin with her always; soon, in an hour or less, the day would be done, and together they would go slowly across the fields, on through the sweet peace and shadows of evening towards home.

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CHAPTER IX

IN the autumn, when harvest was done, Martin kept his promise and took Jane for a holiday. It was to Kyle they went, out into the wilds of Donegal, where the Erne finishes its course at the Atlantic coast. The days were fine, with no more than the booming winds to mar their peace; the little village, struggling white and aimlessly along the high bare cliff, was full of wholesomeness; the air was like wine for potency, the sea like crystal for purity: you had but to eat and sleep, and, for the rest, sit placidly on rock or beach drawing health into your blood. All day long the waves rolled in and tumbled upon the sand, or crashed against the cliffs; all through the night, the long fresh night, their sound came up, muffled like funeral drums, and filled the darkness with moaning—*a sound like thunder everlastingly.*

Standing by the doorway, her face to the

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stars that looked upon the empty street, or kneeling by her bedside, Jane used to catch that sound and be filled with a peace that passeth understanding. Even so she had felt on old Sabbath evenings in autumn-time, when the light had faded beyond the windows and gloom spread among the pews, and the Rector's voice came softly through the hush giving benediction.

It was the first real holiday of her life, the first break almost in the horizon that bounded home, her first sight of the sea; and Jane was all delight. She might have been a child, so thorough was she in enjoying, so artless in her expression of pleasure. Everything was new, beautiful, wonderful; nothing could be better in any world. Such air and freshness, such a sky, such cliffs and rocks and sand; such a sea! There was only one word for it all—the great word of Gorteen: it was powerful.

'I could sit here for ever,' she would say, the place being the bare south cliff, or the height that overlooks the Stook, or no more than the long slope of stunted grass that curves above the beach. 'It's great—it's wonderful—it's powerful. Ah, that big wide sea!'

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'Ay,' Martin would say, resting on his elbow and looking seawards through a cloud of tobacco smoke. 'Ay, 'tis.'

'Never did I think 'twas like this. I used to hear mother tell about it; an' Sam Mires came here for a week one time; an' I 've seen pictures of it an' read about it . . . but sure— Ah, what can words do, or pictures? Look, Martin, at the white waves comin' in; an' listen to the roar of them—the lions' roar.'

'Ay. Yes, indeed.'

'Think of the size of it, Martin—away an' away, out an' away, beyond an' beyond, for thousands an' thousands of miles. Think of thousands of miles like that, all flat an' blue, with only a wee ship here an' there upon it, an' no land for days an' days. Ah, the loneliness there must be. I 'd die of fear to be away out there. Thousands of miles of blue flat sea! . . . Martin, have ye thought that away beyond is America—over the other side?'

'Why, to be sure. America? Ah, wouldn't I like to be there this minute. Think of the yards in Chicago!'

'Ah, yes.' Jane would pause, trying to

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think as Martin thought; then would shake her head, gather up her knees, and rest chin in hands. 'But, Martin dear, what's the land to the sea? The land's so small. Sure we know all about it; it's only fields, an' hills an' houses. But the sea—ah, it's unknowable. "*He gathereth the waters of the sea together as an heap; he layeth up the depth in storehouses.*" "*They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters. These see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep.*" Ah, yes. Often have I read and heard the words; but never have I understood them till now. Aren't they great, Martin?'

'Ay. I suppose they are. Sailors, sure enough, must see curious things.'

'"*As the waters cover the sea. . . . That do business in great waters. These see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep.*" Ah, so they do. Martin, we know nothin'.' Again Jane would pause and sit shaking her head; again would break into murmurs of delight: 'Ah, it's great—it's powerful—it's just lovely. I could sit here for ever an' ever. Couldn't you, Martin?' said Jane one evening, just as the sun was sinking, red and far, into the sea.

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'Hm . . . maybe so. It's not bad in its way. Only—' Martin sat upright, and puffing at his pipe looked right and left at the placid groups that sprawled along the cliffs.

'Only what, Martin?'

'Ah, I dunno. It's dull here at times. The people are dead an' alive. There's nothin' doin'. Waves and rocks are good enough in their way; but——'

Martin stopped at the word. He felt more than he cared to say, more perhaps than he dared to think. Kyle was good, but might be better. He wanted a band, gardens and seats and fireworks, yachts and steamboats. He would like to see well-dressed women, and men who were worth noticing; men something like himself. He was tired of this lazy, monotonous existence. He wanted a change, wanted a companion now and then. Not that he was discontented, or tired of Jane and her simple chatter. No, indeed. He liked to hear her, was pleased to see her so happy; only—Only what? we may ask with Jane. Well, maybe he was used to her.

'Ah,' said he, with a laugh, 'I dunno what I want. If one gets a star one longs for the

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moon. I 'm only romancin'. Come, Jane girl, it 's strikin' cold; an' I 'm as hungry as five troopers. Come away home.'

So Jane had her holiday; then, quite content and full of glad memories, came back to Hill-side and fell quick into her old ways. There was still much sunshine in the days, still great bounty in the fields. Autumn was a melancholy season, and always—perhaps now more than ever—woke thoughts in Jane of mortal death; but even as life ebbed within it so life was the richer for gift of its sweetness. Leaves fell and flowers withered, sap sank and the earth drowsed towards sleep; yet how beautifully the leaves died and lay, and how tardy the fields were in sleeping. A whole month there was of mists and fading. The sheaves and the hay came home to haggard. Heavily the carts went clanking towards the turf-house, piled high with sun-dried peat. Stacks were thatched, fields cleared, machines housed, the barns made ready for threshing-time. Honey was gathered from the hives, strained and potted. Apples came in from the orchard, were sorted and stowed away. There came a few hot glorious days; then a while of wind

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and bitter rain; then a touch of frost upon the lawn: and autumn had gone.

So the trees and hedges were stripped; winter closed around Hillside and shut Jane in. Now might she venture only across the yard or into the haggard; her journeyings abroad took her no further than to church on Sundays, or to Bunn once in a while on market-days, or down the slope to sip tea with Hannah and her mother by the kitchen hearth. Little chance now was there for touch of the sun and breath of the open air. The fields were swamps, the lanes and roads long wastes of mud; cold winds swept up from the lake, bitter rains came down from Bunn and lashed the windows. Just for an hour, sometimes, the sun peeped across the stable roof as it plodded from hill to hill; then sank, and it was long night again in the world.

Still no use in repining. Spring would come some day; meanwhile, let hands be busy. Now was the time for Jane to fashion herself into worthy mistress of Hillside. All that the Mother knew she must learn. She must watch and copy; ask and take heed. Impossible ever to equal the Mother—to catch those

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dainty old-fashioned ways, to master all those subtleties of housewifery—yet maybe it were possible to approach her. Already she had learnt much; oh, very much. She took more pride in her appearance; her efforts at table no longer made the Mother frown and Martin laugh; she knew how to dust and polish, sweep and order; as a cook her success could never be great, but one day it might be fair. Patience, whispered Jane to herself; and patiently, her face always placid, her voice unruffled, went striving dutifully towards perfection through wintry days.

They held their own pleasures, those short days of winter; always between them were the long quiet evenings. Then, work being over, all without safe for the night and the doors closed, Jane used to carry her knitting into the parlour and settle herself before the great peat fire. On that side was the Mother, deep in a haircloth chair; here sat Martin, legs outstretched, his mind bent on a newspaper; behind, the lamp burnt softly, candles flickered on the mantel, the room was warm and cheerful. Sometimes Martin read the news and made comment upon it, drawing

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sighs from the women and pitying exclamation, murmurs of assent when wickedness was punished, doleful shakings of the head at doings of men and parties whose views were not as the Squire's. Again, when Martin had gone asleep (he had a gift of sleep), or had not come home (sometimes business kept him from home), the Mother wiped her spectacles, drew near the lamp and read the news; and thence always came discussions, simple and very harmless, on the ways of Society, the doings at Court, the mysteries of Fashion. For the Mother, in her youth, had been nurse with the Louths, and had travelled and seen. She knew London, Paris, Rome; had seen the Queen and many famous people; could trace the pedigree of Lords and Ladies, and recall the wonders of Parks and Palaces. She was full of memories. A chance word would transport her; and thereafter, for hours mayhap, Jane and she—Martin also at times —would sit rapt in sight of bygone things and times: of London in the Fifties and Paris in the days of its prime, of Coronation day, of gorgeous marriages and great funerals and glittering banquets, of the Louths as

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children, of beautiful women, soldiers, singers she had heard and seen. Also she remembered the great Irish famine and spoke often of that; nor did she fail in memories of Hillside, and of her dead husband, and of Martin as a child. 'Such a pretty boy you were, Martin, with your roses and curls. Ah, but children change!' And there would be laughter round the hearth.

Then, too, when Martin was away, the mother would sing an old-time ballad or a quaint old psalm to a quavering old melody; or, whilst Martin slept, would read in the Bible and speak with Jane concerning their souls. Very earnestly they would speak, their heads bent and faces solemn; peace in their hearts and full assurance. They had no doubts. The faith they held was pure and simple, real and satisfying. God the Father was always in their midst. God ruled his earth in uprightness; reigned above in majesty. So surely as men sinned, so surely they were punished here and hereafter; but the meek inherited the earth and passed to life eternal. To be good and humble, to seek righteousness, to live as children of a

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Heavenly Father: such were the plain duties to which they were called. There was only one Book and every word in it was divine; only one way, narrow and straight, that led upwards. Ah, they were vile sinners: but God was gracious and might grant them pardon. They must strive and pray. Only a little while longer remained to her of mortal life, said the Mother, bending over her withered hands; constantly now must she turn eyes upon the Eternal, watching and praying always. Life was but a span and no man knew the hour of calling, said Jane, her face bent and solemn; how fearful a thing for the call to come and find them unprepared! Was she ready? Was her light burning? If God called now was she fit to meet Him? Was it sure that when death parted Martin from her they would meet again in glory? Ah, she feared. She had grown careless of late, proud and forgetful. And Martin? Was he ready? Ah, she feared much. He was heedless; given to questioning and mockery, fond of putting things aside with a laugh and a *time enough.* Time enough? Who knew? Just now he was big and strong, said Jane, and glanced at

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Martin as he slept, or looked at his empty chair and thought of him outside somewhere in the night; but what was strength in face of death? Suppose the call came to-night? Suppose, on his way home . . . Ah, she dared not think of it. And Jane's lips would move silently as she sat; for a while she would ponder sadly in her heart; then would go and at her bedside pray long for Martin, and herself, and every one—for Martin most of all.

Also there were nights when Red Hugh and Martin held long discourse across the hearth, when Big Ned filled the parlour with empty bellowing, or Sam Mires sat pulling his whiskers in genteel silence whilst Hannah chattered and Maria talked scandal; nights when Martin entertained his friends and Jane heard the flip of cards as she lay in the darkness; nights when the Mother went early and left Jane and Martin alone before the fire.

They spoke not often then, and seldom intimately. What was there to be said that had not been said before? Jane had her knitting and her thoughts, Martin had his newspapers and his thoughts. What Jane

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was thinking, Martin either thought he knew or hardly cared to know; what Martin was thinking, Jane might wish to know but might not care to ask. They knew each other so well. Soon it would be a year since their wedding-day. They were old married people. Words were unnecessary. If Jane looked towards the window and said that the night was wild, did not Martin know that already? If Martin yawned wearily and said he was getting sleepy, had not Jane known that this hour? Why chatter idly like lovers under the moon? What had happened to-day that had not happened yesterday, that was worth a word? Why should Martin discuss affairs with Jane, or worry her with money matters? Men had their own view of things, women their own little outlook. Discussion led to argument; argument with a woman meant personalities and disagreement. Even the Mother could not consider a point without bringing in herself; even Jane could not take a fall in silence or keep back tears when words were hard. Enough that Martin was satisfied, that Jane seemed content. She had a good home, everything she might desire;

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what more in the world, Martin may have thought in some odd minute of easeful silence, what more could woman want? Mistress of Hillside, wife of Squire Martin: she was one in ten thousand.

But one night Jane put down her knitting, looked at the fire; then turned her face.

'Martin.'

'Well? . . . Yes, Jane.'

'Are ye tired of me?'

'Tired of you?' Martin sat staring, a frown on his brow. The question was so blunt, searched so deeply. 'Tired of you? Good Lord! What on earth have I been doing now?'

'You're so silent, Martin. We sit an' sit—an' ye never speak.'

'Hm. . . . So that's it.' Martin leant forward in his chair. 'Tell me, Jane: what is there to say? You know all about me. You know all that's happened the day, an' yesterday, an' the day before. What is there to say, now?'

'I know, Martin.' Jane sat looking at the fire; then looked round smiling. 'Ye used to have plenty to say,' she said.

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'Did I? When? You mean before we were married?'

'Yes, Martin—and afterwards.'

'Hm. I know. And you'd like me to talk like that now?'

'A little, Martin.'

'Hm.' Martin considered a moment. 'You'd like me to flatter you, an' whisper about nothin', an' be like Sam Mires with Hannah?'

'No, no.' Jane smiled. 'Oh no.'

'Then what?'

'Just to tell me something, to let me know what you're thinkin' an' doin'—just something.'

'An' don't I, Jane?'

'Not much. You— Oh, I'm not complaining. Don't think it. Only—' Jane paused. 'I feel sometimes, Martin, as if I wasn't your wife at all.'

'Hm. Just because I don't speak at times?'

'No, no. But we seem different; like strangers. I want to speak, an' can't. When your mother goes, I feel as if I ought to go too, as if ye didn't want me. I—I—' Jane paused; looked at her hands. 'Ah, I can't explain myself. I'm only stumblin'.' She looked up. 'Martin, ye do want me?'

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'Want you? Why to be sure. God bless me, don't you know I do? Woman dear, what's come to you? Just because I don't sit chatterin' like a jackdaw, an' talkin' nonsense! Ah, have wit, have wit. We're not children. We're sensible people with work to do. Would you have me worryin' your life out wi' all the little trials I've got to bear? Would you be worryin' me with all the little troubles that come to yourself? Ah, not at all. I'm tired at times. I have things to think about. I don't want to be bothered. I know you're content an' happy. I'm satisfied an' content. Isn't that enough, Jane?'

'Ah, yes. . . . Ye *are* satisfied, Martin?'

'Why to be sure. Great king, haven't I said I am?'

'An' ye never wish ye hadn't married me?'

'Wish? Wish that? Good Lord!' Martin leant towards Jane, his eyes hard upon her face. 'Tell me,' said he; 'have I ever, by word or deed, given you cause to ask such a question?'

'No, Martin; never.'

'Then why do you ask it?'

Jane hesitated. She sighed; looked at her

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hands and shook her head. 'I dunno, Martin; I dunno. Maybe it's because I get lonely sometimes. Maybe it's because I'm—because I'm not good enough.'

'Ah, quit,' cried Martin. 'Quit this nonsense, for God's sake! Good enough? Wait till I complain—wait till I complain.'

Then Jane turned in her chair and met Martin's eyes, her own bright with wistfulness. 'I'm foolish,' she said. 'But tell me one thing, Martin—just one. Suppose anything was to happen—soon or late—suppose I was to die, would ye be sorry? Would ye miss me?'

It was a question that women often ask; a question that men often answer glibly with soft words of evasion. Maybe had Martin searched his heart he had answered differently; but he did not search, only sprang to his feet and faced Jane before the fire. 'You're mad,' he cried, spreading a hand towards her. 'You've no right to talk like this. You're doing yourself harm. Die? Why should you die more than another? I forbid such talk. . . .'

'But won't ye answer me, Martin? Ye would be sorry—ah, tell it to me!'

'I 'll—I 'll—' Then Martin stopped,

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mastered by that strange light in Jane's eyes; leant and placed his hands on her shoulders. 'I would be sorry, Jane,' he said. 'God knows I would. You believe me?'

A moment Jane sat in silence, looking upon Martin's face.

'I do, Martin,' she said. 'I do.'

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CHAPTER X

IN the spring a child was born to Jane; and there was joy in Hillside. A son and heir? A little Squire? A grandson at last? No wonder Martin was jubilant, and the Mother rapturous, and Jane filled with sweet content.

All through the young spring days Jane lay, frail and helpless, yet strong with a great strength. A wondrous light shone in her face. Her tongue found a new language. A new world, wide and deep as eternity, opened out before her and was filled to the edge with bounty. Her own child, hers and Martin's, nestling beside her, so soft and perfect! The great love that possessed her, the joy unutterable, the peace that passed all knowledge! Ah, life was sweet. God was good.

The days passed as in a dream that dawned to waking and sank to sleep, the sunshine falling in them or soft beating of rain. The

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sounds of the world came in—of birds singing, cattle lowing, cocks crowing, the voices of men and children, the distant rumble of carts upon the road—and its fragrance of spring-time. Pleasant even to hear the closing of a door, the clatter of tins in the kitchen, the clink of cup and saucer in the parlour; the careful step of one mounting the stairs, the soft rustle of the Mother's dress, or the crooning of her voice as she bent over the child before the fire. Good to feel strength returning with each waking from long sleep, to lie dreaming of the future and all that lay within it, to watch the light grow and twilight deepen, to see women come with presents for the child and sure bounty of praise, to hear Hannah's laugh and Maria's chattering and the Mother's sapient counselling; to hearken for Martin's coming and to see him enter, so big and radiant.

Two or three times a day he used to come for a minute's talk; of an evening would sit sometimes for hours. He was always welcome, his big hearty self. The pride of fatherhood sat well upon him. 'Well an' how's yourself this mornin', Jane, girl?' he would say, standing at the bed-foot with his arms resting on the

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rail. 'Feelin' stronger are you? That's the way. An' how's the big son?' he would ask, stepping lightly round and peering down. 'Faith, he's growin' like a mushroom. Top o' the mornin' to you, young man; an' may you stand six feet outside your shoes some day. He's like you, Jane; he is so. Here, give him to me,' he would say, when evening had come, and he sat by the fireside; 'give him over to me, mother. Lord, the weight he is! Ho, my boy, there's the makings of a man in that wee body of yours. Look at me, sir; look at your big ugly father. Why, he's pounds heavier since last night, Jane; by my soul he is—the fat wee glutton. Laugh, my hero, you an' your solemn countenance. Come now; just one smile before you leave me. . . . Ah, not one; no more than if yourself was a robed bishop an' me only a clodhopper starin' at you from a pew. What! It's cry you'd do? Away wi' you, then, for an ungrateful scoundrel. I'm ashamed of you. I disown you. . . . But listen to me, Jane. What are we goin' to make of him?'

'Ah, time enough to think o' that yet, Martin.'

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'Time enough, you say? Pooh, woman; don't be foolish. Come now, haven't you made a plan or two yourself, lyin' there all the day? Confess now.'

'Well, maybe so. But what 's the use? He 's in God's hand, Martin.'

'Ay, he is; he is. . . . Still, no harm in plannin'. I keep thinkin' of him all the day. He 'll have good schoolin', an' trainin'. I 'll teach him to ride and shoot. He 'll learn a trade of some kind to fit him for the world. . . .'

'Don't, Martin. I wish ye wouldn't. Wait, Martin; wait.'

'But why? Heavens above, woman, what harm in talkin'? It won't alter things. . . . Very well, then,' Martin would say, as Jane's hand slipped out and pleadingly rested on his arm. 'I 'll say no more. But have you settled on a name yet? No. Well, let 's settle now, then.'

And for long enough Jane and the Mother and Martin would ponder the question of what name this wonder of a child should bear in its passage through the world.

They gave it the name of Martin as it lay

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one Sabbath morning in the Rector's arms, clad in the long white robe which had been Martin's own. Red Hugh, Sam Mires, and Hannah stood as sponsors, all very grave and weighted with some sense of responsibility. Jane prayed long on its behalf; Martin stood proud beside the door; a whole congregation received it into the fold. There was hand-shaking, after service, and noise of congratulation among the tombs; much feasting also in Hillside, when the cars had returned and the company gathered expectantly in the parlour. All whom we know were there, and many more whose fame does not concern us —friends of the Fallons, friends of Martin, distant relatives who came from afar and whose faces were not often seen in Hillside. There was plenty to eat and drink. Big Ned carved, and jested, and blundered. Red Hugh sat important in wrinkled broadcloth, striving hard to keep his knife from rising; Maria prideful in faded satin, watchful and condescending, genteel and precise. Sam Mires was suave as a bishop, ready of hand and word, quick in sight of an empty plate. None merrier there than Hannah; heartier than

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Martin; happier than Jane, mother now and wife and mistress of Hillside in one. Jests were flung from chair to chair, laughter swelled along the table. Toasts went round, healths and good wishes passed; long life and prosperity was the word for young Martin, honoured well and noisily.

Then, all being satisfied, the men trooped out to yard and field, leaving the women to their gossip. Dresses and bonnets were discussed, the latest fashions in Bunn town, and the latest news in Gorteen. Memories were exchanged, old days and ways recalled. Here two sat bobbing solemn heads over dusty happenings; there a group was in conclave round Jane and the child. Upstairs Hannah and a friend whispered sweet confidences; by the kitchen hearth Maria joined the Mother in secret council on family affairs. In the yard couples droned politics and markets by the garden wall, or took the sunshine on the orchard ditch; or Martin led a party through the fields, or Sam Mires weighed coat-tails in the haggard and discussed the sermon with a neighbour, or one crept into the hayloft and happily slept. At five o'clock there was tea in

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the parlour; at six whisky for the men, and hymns, led by Miss Hynes of Bunn seminary, for the women; at eight high supper in the parlour; at nine a chapter and prayer by Red Hugh; at ten Good-night and God bless you at the gate: and the day was done.

A memorable day, surely, in slow-moving, commonplace Gorteen; yet soon to be forgotten or remembered only with a shudder, standing there as ironic background of rosy colouring behind the gloom of that other day, so quick and fateful, when once more cars stood in Hillside avenue, and port was drunk solemnly in the parlour, and there was wailing upstairs, and black-coated figures went out and drove away and laid the child to rest in the shadows of Drumhill churchyard. No feasting then and sound of merriment; only lamentations and woe. Such terror of suddenness; such calamity of change. Yesterday fond hopes and good wishes, to-day swift sickness and eyes meeting in dread above the Mother's knee; now death and a last good-bye. All in a week or two; all in a day, it might seem, with that other piteous day standing out behind—so close and horrible.

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The blow was hard. Its pitiless falling killed sunshine in the sky and spread gloom over Hillside. What a mockery seemed those blithesome days, that spring whose wakening meant death. Dead? Buried away for evermore? Ah, heartless shining of life-giving sun!

The Mother was stricken, face to face once more with the grim destroyer. Often before had she faced it, wondering as she wept; now, even in sight of the ultimate end, she could not understand. Why—why—why? Had she been taken it were well; but the child, the little child. It seemed cruel strange. Martin also bent under the blow, grieving long and rebelliously; but he might always carry sorrow into the fields and bury it there, whilst Jane and the Mother were shut in with grief, shut away from any forgetting with relic and memory.

Jane was inconsolable. For days she hardly spoke, through many nights she did not sleep; when tears came at last it seemed that she must weep for life. Could she ever smile again, ever sing or pray? Ah, no, no. Could she forget—some day, some day? Never for

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a single hour. Always now her heart must be heavy, her life only a weariness of mere existence.

At first she was dazed. Her child gone, dead and gone away? Surely not. It was all some horrible dream, something that was sent and would pass away. For hours she would sit with folded hands, or lie staring with blind eyes. She went silently from room to room, moving as might a ghost, her face like ashes and cold as stone. Sometimes she would leave her work or rise suddenly from table, and would creep upstairs. Maybe—maybe—maybe he was there. . . . But never did she find him.

Then, it being quite sure, her heart found bitterness and revolt. What had she done to deserve such punishment? Why had any happiness come if thus it were to be snatched away? Why had life flickered for a moment, a moment of light and sleep, only to be stamped into darkness? Just a while of sunshine, a glimpse and a breath; then utter blackness. . . .

Had God done this inscrutable, pitiless thing; God the kind and merciful, the Shep-

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herd of little children? Even if punishment must fall, suffering come, why should her child be chosen? There were others—Great God, there were others!

Had God done it? Had He given, and then repented of His gift? Had He intrusted a soul to her charge; then finding her unworthy, taken it again to Himself? Perhaps so. She had been so proud, filled big with selfish joy. She had worshipped the child, planned out its future, seen it pass adown the glorious years. Not Martin only, but she also had dreamt vain dreams. And now she was punished. Her pride was broken, her heart pierced.

Ah, she was wicked and rebellious. God knew best. His hand might seem heavy, but it ruled in justice. 'God forgive me; God make me worthy to meet my child again,' prayed Jane, as she went toiling through the day or knelt lonely in the night: but often in her prayers she had sight of a mound in shadow of the yews.

Time marched on, working inevitable change. Day followed day, from spring on to summertime; one by one the nights glided out, crowd-

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ing back the past. The Mother ceased wondering; Martin found laughter again; Jane dried her eyes and sought consolation in toil. Work went on as ever; neighbours called and went; at night the Fallons came, or a friend to supper; Sundays brought rest and time for thought; there was buying and selling, eating and drinking, worry, drudgery; everything seemed just as of old and as it should be—yet somehow was not. Ah no, thought Jane; nothing was nearly the same.

At meal-time now, the three sat silent often, with something between them that would not go. Even if they talked of this and that, or laughed occasionally, it was never certain that Jane would not stop of a sudden, grow pale and let a tear run down her cheek. In the evenings, after work, the hours went silently, Martin being weary and Jane having only a single thought that lay too deep for words. On Sabbaths as they drove to church, high in the narrow gig, why should not Martin keep eyes upon the fields when Jane's were fixed before her, straining down the long road that ended at a little mound. During service, or at night whilst the preacher discoursed, was

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it wonder that Martin pondered, or fell asleep, or looked at Kate Trant and reflected on the ways of women, with Jane sitting cold beside him, never turning her head (as once she had done) or whispering a word—as far from him as though seas rolled between? What for Jane were fields and hills; what mattered it now whether rain or sunshine filled the world; what were friends or self—now that blackness lay within? Everything had changed, thought Jane; everything everywhere. Try as she might, pray as she would, her heart kept heavy. Even though God were just and her child gone back to Him: always remained that lonely mound.

Sometimes she trudged across the hills with Martin's lunch or the basket and can at tea-time; but she went listlessly, stayed only a little time, seldom dragged a rake or carried a sheaf, always trudged back alone with her eyes on the path. Occasionally she walked down the avenue and stood a minute at the gate; once or twice crossed the lawn, came to the turf banks and sat miserable among the heather, seeing and hearing nothing. All delight in life seemed dead, all interest shrunken

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to the limits of mere existence. It mattered nothing whether she ate from delf or china, in parlour or kitchen; whether she walked or rode, slept or woke. Nothing mattered now. All pride in her person had gone. One bonnet was just as good as another; this dress as that. Be it they were clean, why trouble if her hands were coarse, her face pinched, her hair in disorder? These were only trifles. She drudged constantly. Martin would find her mixing food for the pigs, arms bare, skirt tucked high, a coarse apron before her. He saw her at the wash-tub, the ironing-board, in the byre milking, in the dairy scrubbing; always pale and silent, bedraggled often and soiled. She came to meals in her working garb, wore the dress of an evening that she had worn all day. If he spoke she answered wearily; when he laughed she sighed. And he, for all that he pitied her and in a fashion understood, grew tired of her ways in time; then impatient; at last resentful. Grieving was natural, he thought; sighing and tears only to be expected. But there were limits. Men had rights. Women had duties.

One morning, the time for lunch having

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gone past empty, he strode in from the fields. The kitchen was in disorder. Pots and pans strewed the floor. The hearth was full of ashes, the fire low upon it. On a chair sat the Mother, shelling peas into a colander.

'Where's Jane?'

'I don't know, Martin.'

'Hm. This is a pretty pig-crow for a man to put foot in. How is it nothing's been sent to me?'

'I don't know, Martin. I thought——'

'Ay, ye thought! There's a power o' thinkin' done in this house, nowadays, it seems to me. Less thinkin' and more doin' 'd serve the purpose better, I imagine. Be the Lord, I might starve for all the attention I get. Bah—I'm sick of it.'

Martin turned for the door; but the Mother caught his arm.

'Wait, Martin; wait. You mustn't be angry, my son. Remember what's happened.'

'I do remember. But there's a time for all things. Suppose I humoured my feelin's and sat sighin' all day behind a hedge—a fine lot o' sympathy I'd get.'

'Ah, but women are different, Martin. Jane

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is very different. She can't help herself: indeed she can't. She tries, but——'

'She doesn't,' snapped Martin; then strode forth and found Jane working in the garden. The sunshine fell broad upon her, full and gloriously, as leaning on a spade she bent low between the ridges and the weeds that sprang upon them. Her bodice was open at the neck, her skirt bunched up; she wore an old straw hat and heavy boots. Just such another figure she made as the figure whose hands Martin had taken, one morning in spring, and claimed for his own. But that was long ago.

'How is it nothing 's been sent to me?'

Jane stood upright, a weed in this hand the spade in that, and looked at Martin. His abrupt coming and abrupter speech had startled her. She had been deep in her one thought. 'Ah, I forgot,' she said, with a passing flush. 'I meant to go; but I forgot.'

'Ah, you forgot. You're good at forgettin'. No; you needn't mind now,' said Martin, as Jane turned towards the house. 'If I can wait this long, I can wait till dinner-time. What are you doin' out here?'

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Jane did not answer; only sighed and stood looking on the ground.

'A fine pickle there's in there.' Martin flung a hand towards the house. His voice came angry. 'A fine thing, at this hour o' the day, for a man to go pickin' his steps through his own kitchen. A pretty business to find one's mother slavin' in her old age, an' *you* out here amusin' yourself. What d' you mean by it?' said Martin, loud and wrathfully.

Jane stood silent, her face blanching in the sunshine.

'Answer me. What d' you mean by it?'

'I—I don't know, Martin. I 'm sorry. I can't help it.'

'But you can help it. I won't have it. I 've had patience long enough. I know how you 're feelin', I know—' Martin's voice softened; he came nearer. 'Look here, Jane. I don't want to be unreasonable. But just ask yourself if you think you 're doin' right. Are you, now?'

Jane tried to speak, but words failed her. She sighed and fell to scraping the clay with her boot. Martin went on.

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'D' you think it 's right to let things go on as they are? The house neglected; everything higgledy-piggledy; yourself — look at the figure you are,' cried Martin. 'Just like any beggar-woman! Is that how I 'm wishful to see you, I ask? Is this the kind o' work —this an' all the other work you 've been partial to o' late—that I 'd wish you to do? Drudgin' an' sloppin', trailin' from one tub to another; is that fit occupation for wife o' mine? Look at your hands. Look at your hair. Look at the whole rig o' you. Look at you standin' there, an' never answerin' me a word. Ah,' cried Martin, turning away, 'I 'm weary of it — heart weary.'

Then Jane spoke. 'Martin,' she said. 'Martin.'

'Well?'

'I can't help it, Martin. 'Deed an' word, I can't. I do try. I strive to be as I used to be —but I can't. Everything is changed. I have no heart. Always and ever I keep thinkin' the one thing—always and ever.'

'An' have I no thoughts?' Martin swung round. 'Have I no feelin's?'

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'Ah, yes. I know—I know . . . Give me time, Martin. Bear with me for a while. I 'll be better. It 'll all go. Give me time, Martin.'

'I 'll give you everything. I 'll bear anything. Only,' cried Martin, spreading wide his hands, 'for God's sake be different to me. I ask little. Show me a different face sometimes; give me a laugh and a word now and then; stop your moilin' an' drudgin'. Think what you will . . . only don't forget who I am, an' what you are, an' what 's expected of you. You hear me, Jane?'

'I do, Martin.'

'An' you 'll heed?'

'I will, Martin.'

'That 's right. An' now, like a good woman, put down that spade an' go and make yourself respectable. And let this be the last time I 'll have to speak to you.'

Jane crossed through the sunshine, going slowly and heavily, stood the spade against the garden wall, and went out through the gateway into the yard. Martin watched her go, hands clasped behind him and a frown on his

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brow. She looked much the same as one morning in spring-time she had looked, in those old days, so far away now, of her lesser trouble. Then Martin had taken her in his arms. Now he did not.

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CHAPTER XI

JANE took heed. There was disorder in the kitchen no more. The luncheon-basket went to the fields without fail. She ceased drudging in yard and garden. When the rougher work of the house was done she made herself respectable, as Martin had bidden, summoned cheerfulness to her face and bore herself bravely. At table she kept down her thought, talked a little, and sometimes laughed. In the evenings she knitted, or read in the Bible, or sat with the Mother in the porch till twilight had gone; occasionally stood by Martin as he leant over the lawn gate smoking and pondering, at intervals went down the slope and sat awhile with Hannah and Maria by the old hearthstone, once or twice, in those long calm evenings of high summer-time, slipped through the fields, seated herself on a bank, and nursed her thought in peace beneath the stars. On Thursdays she drove

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into Bunn town, sold the butter and eggs and did the marketing; now and again went out into the world and came to Clogheen or Glann and spent the day there, wandering through the stalls, looking at the shops, watching Martin sell a horse, having dinner with him in grandeur at the hotel. On pavement or roadway, in parlour or kitchen, she talked pleasantly with friend and neighbour, bearing herself meekly always, yet not without a certain air of sad dignity in her black dress with its deep folds of crape. Regularly each Sunday she went to church, training herself in time to walk from porch to gate without flinching. In July she went to an Orange celebration near Clogheen, endured drum and fife, fervour and sunshine, through a weary day; sat pridefully upon the platform whilst Martin declaimed, sipped ginger wine in the Lodge at night whilst True Blues thundered. In August she saw Martin judging at the local show, heard him shout at Glann races, joined in the applause which marked his speech at a parish soiree. Many envied her lot, these seeing only with their eyes. Indeed she seemed happy in her quiet way, contented and recon-

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ciled. Time had passed on, so you might have thought had you seen her go placidly through the days, bearing away trouble and leaving her as she had been before trouble came; a little graver maybe, a new line on her brow, fresh grey in her hair—the paltriest changes. Neighbours meeting her on the sidewalks and friends looking at her across the parlour table, said she looked bravely, thank God, and was nearly herself again, and was the fortunate woman anyway, she with everything she needed in the world at her elbow and a whole Squire facing her beyond the cups: but the Mother, always near and rich in sympathy, saw better than these. She knew what had come and gone with that handful of months. None came near the real Jane who stopped at the surface, neither Martin nor another. Outwardly she might not have changed greatly; inwardly she had changed much. Her face might be glad, her heart was not. She never sang now; her smiles were only show; her prayers, the Mother guessed, had lost in certainty. The hand of sorrow was relaxing, but still it gripped her close and selfishly. She was hardened something. Her old childish simplicity of mind

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and character, of manner also, seemed lost or hid. Hardly anything interested her now, and few things mattered; few certainly in this mortal world. She only adorned her body that Martin might see—Martin whose eyes were keen on the body and its paltry showing —only went abroad because Martin maybe wished it. Alone and selfishly—yes, selfishly —she lived in her little world of sorrowful memory, hardly peering upon the world without. Impossible to be with her day after day, to sit with her evening by evening, and not see all this. She, the Mother, saw it clearly; Martin also, in a dim unthinking way, he being concerned mostly with the outward manifestations, the things which reached himself, saw what he might not discern. There sat Jane, silent and morose, worn and old: changed surely, changed to him. The Mother knew it instinctively; saw it in his manner and looks, in the way he sat silent at table, the fling he gave to his chair in rising and his quick stride from the room, in his way of avoiding Jane and of scorning her with his eyes, in his growing habit of seeking diversion across the hills. Were not these plain signs of change, of gradual insidious

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change, working so that only those who had eyes could see? It used not to be so. It ought not to be so now. It was not what the Mother had hoped; yet, somehow, was only what she had expected. Martin was hard to please, was changeable, had strange lack of sympathy; cared more for a look than a thought, the whiteness of a hand than the pureness of a heart; was a man, with a man's full capacity for tiring of a plaything, neglecting it, flinging it away when novelty and gloss had gone. Men were all the same. Not blindly had she lived her life, not idly pondered this big masterful Martin all these years. Even she had not always pleased; the woman that should satisfy him entirely was not born. Somewhere, perhaps, was one who might have held and kept—Kate Trant, maybe, or another —but simple, plain-faced Jane . . .

Ah, it was not Jane's fault. She did her best. Sooner or later must have come weary change. That miserable happening which had worked such havoc in Jane's heart had but hastened the inevitable. The Mother knew why Martin had married; knew how Jane had doubted. He had mastered and

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claimed her; she had yielded. But in yielding she had given herself wholly; and wholly even now she was his. Only Martin was tiring; and Jane was in the clouds of her little world, not seeing and perhaps not much caring; and Martin would go on tiring and wandering farther into old paths, and Jane some day would awake and see plain truth.

Would that day of awaking come too late? Ah, no, no. For Martin's sake, this boy of her heart, for Jane's sake, this woman whom she loved so well, that day must not come too late. Something, the Mother said, must be done. She must give Jane help and comfort, lead her back to her old self; and Martin she must also lead, God helping her, back to the old bright ways.

So, God helping her, the Mother set herself between Martin and Jane, and strove to bring them nearer; even if not quite near, yet nearer. Her wisest and most tactful she did, with all patience. This withered hand and that she reached out, trying to bring them close. She schemed and contrived, suggested and arranged. At table she chattered gaily,

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smoothing Martin's frowns and drawing his eyes to herself; helping Jane to look and do her best, luring her real self up into broad sunshine, that Martin perchance might see. When days were fair she left them together; when gloomy kept near. She sent Jane into the fields, suggested that she should drive to meet Martin at the station, or bear him company in some of his expeditions abroad; endeavoured to keep Martin at home of evenings, tempting him with pipe and newspaper, hearty supper and easy-chair. She spared no pains to make Jane efficient in affairs, none to keep all smooth in Martin's path. Now and then would a subtle hint, a suggestive word, be dropped in Martin's ear; always was the Mother at Jane's side, brimming with sympathy and wisest counsel.

'They're all the same, my dear; the nearest way to their heart is through their mouths, the next nearest is through their eyes. . . . Now suppose we give Martin a hot cake for his tea and a couple of fresh eggs? And suppose you run upstairs and put on your blue apron, and slip on your rings, and get out your gold brooch?'

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'Ah, but, mother! Why it's only three months since——'

'My dear, Martin likes it.'

Again:

'Jane, did I hear Martin say he was driving in to Bunn this evening?'

'I—I think so, mother.'

'You think? My dear child, you shouldn't think. It's your duty to know. You should take an interest in Martin's doings. Now, when he comes into tea just say you'd like to go with him. He'll be glad to have you, and the drive will do you good, and . . . Yes, Jane. Come, speak out. What is it you're thinking?'

'I'm thinking, mother, that maybe Martin mightn't want me to come. He——'

'Yes, Jane?'

'If he wanted me he'd ask me.'

'Ah, my dear, my dear! It's so foolish to think like that, so very foolish. May not Martin think it's *you* who doesn't want to go? . . .'

Again, maybe that same afternoon, the Mother would slip upstairs and knock softly at Jane's door.

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'Jane. May I come in? My dear, I'm so glad you're going. The change will do you good. But, my child, my child'—and the Mother's hands would rise slowly, her worn ring, that symbol of her experience, shining on her worn finger—'you must not go in that dress. What would people think? What would Martin say? Remember, Jane, you must be a credit to him. He's so particular; and nothing displeases a man more than to see his wife look shabby. Now, put on everything of your best: your new black dress and gloves, and your best bonnet and shoes, and tie a ribbon round your throat, and——'

'A ribbon? Ah but, mother, how can I?'

'My dear, you must not consider yourself always. Martin would like it.'

Again, one evening, as they lingered in the porch, sitting idly with folded hands and watching the twilight deepen:

'Jane.'

'Yes, mother.'

'Has Martin gone out?'

'I think— Yes, mother.'

'Where has he gone?'

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'I—I dunno.'

'No? But why don't you know? It's your duty to know. Didn't you ask him?'

'No.'

'Ah, my dear, my dear! It's so foolish. . . . And do you never ask him?'

'Not—not always.'

'And why not?'

'I'm—' *Afraid* was the word perhaps; but Jane did not say it, only shook her head and sighed. 'Ah, I dunno.'

'Then you must know, Jane. It's your duty. And you must try to keep Martin always at home. Now suppose you invite a few friends to spend an evening? We could have some supper, and perhaps a game of cards—'

'Cards, mother! Ah, no, no—not yet.'

'My dear, you must consider Martin.'

Again, one evening as they sat beside the lamp, bending over their work and listening to the mournful beat of rain upon the panes:

'My dear.'

Jane looked up from her thought. 'Yes, mother.'

'Do you always remember Martin in your prayers?'

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'Remember?' Jane dropped her hands. 'Oh, always an' ever; always an' ever. Surely ye know that?'

'Yes, I know it, Jane. Only the thought came to me. Never forget him.'

'Ah, never in the world. How could I? How could I?'

'You might, Jane. Sometimes things happen. I find myself wandering very often, forgetting and wandering away. . . . Jane, Martin needs our prayers. We must always be thinking of him and asking God to help him. He has so much to occupy his mind. He comes home tired and wet—dear heart, the night it is—and maybe forgets, or maybe prays without thinking. But we must never forget. . . . Do you think of him often through the day?'

Jane hesitated a moment, raised her knitting and bent her head. 'I do,' she answered. 'Ah, surely I do.'

'And are they happy thoughts, Jane?'

Once more Jane hesitated. 'Ah, they are,' she answered. 'I suppose they are—as happy as I can make them.'

As happy as she could make them? Yes.

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The words were true. Her utmost the Mother might strive, but no contriving in the world, no power of sympathy, no doing of wisdom, might lead shrinking thought out into the full shine of happiness. Only time, and the grace of the Lord, could work that miracle. The Mother sighed, bent her eyes, and again the sad beat of rain filled the quiet of the room.

Still, the Mother persevered in her striving; and one night, as she sat alone in the parlour, Martin came in and crossed to his chair. He had been away at a fair; he looked weary and travel-stained, and a little flushed. Supper was laid for him, but he refused to eat. He answered the Mother's questions, asked a few in turn, glanced at the newspaper, then looked up.

'Where's Jane?'

'Gone home, Martin.'

'I know. How long has she been gone?'

'Oh, an hour or two. She'll be back soon.'

'I know.'

Martin nodded, turned his newspaper and went on reading. The Mother looked at him, now and again, across her spectacles. A

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year ago he would have gone to meet Jane. Presently she spoke.

'Is the night fine, Martin?'

'Middlin'. Why?'

'I 'm wondering if Jane will find it lonesome on her way back.'

'Ah, the father will come with her, or Hannah. Anyhow, she knows the way.'

The Mother sighed softly, worked silently for a while; spoke again and more boldly.

'Martin, do you think Jane is happy?'

'Happy?' He lowered his newspaper. 'Why shouldn't she be happy? Why d'you ask?'

'Oh, for no reason in particular, Martin, except that she seems dull at times and not what she used to be. Haven't you noticed that yourself, Martin?'

'Ah, I've noticed lots of things—lots of them.' Martin smiled sardonically, in haste went on: 'But no matter about that. We're talkin' now about what *you've* noticed. Come, if you've anything to say, say it.'

The Mother hesitated. Would saying do any good, just now, Martin's humour being what it was and her own hardly cheerful?

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She shook her head; then, moved by a quick impulse, lowered her hands and spoke:

'I think, Martin, that you give Jane little consideration.'

'I know. You mean because of—what's happened?'

'Yes, and because of other things.'

'What things?'

'I think you're tired of her, Martin,' said the Mother, her face flushing a little, her hands working. 'I think you're neglecting her. I think you're not trying to see what's really good in her, or to give her your sympathy and affection.' Suddenly she leant towards him, her voice softening and her eyes. 'Ah, my son, forgive me. It's not my business to speak. I don't want to hurt you. But, Martin, Jane is a woman in ten thousand. Her heart is pure gold. Her life-blood she would give to serve you. She does try, Martin, really she does. She can't help being as she is. It's the first great trouble of her life. Bear with her, my son, for a while, give her a little time, try to be to her as you used to be. She's worth it, Martin; oh, believe me, she's worth it all.'

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Martin had been sitting deep in his chair, legs crossed, his eyes hard on the Mother's face; now he flung the newspaper on the table, unfolded his legs and leant forward.

'Be the Lord,' said he, with a gibing laugh, 'but this is great! Faith, it's home a man must come to hear news. Tired of her? Neglectin' her?' His voice rose swiftly to harshness, his face blazed into anger. 'Arrah, what romancin' is this? Who's changed?' Martin sprang to his feet, turned his back towards the fireplace and flung out an arm. 'Answer me. Who's changed? Am I the one that sits silent an' glum? Is it me that has as much affection in me as the chair beyond? Is it me—?' All suddenly Martin stopped. A cunning look flashed into his eyes. He bent forward and eyed the Mother askance. 'Tell me,' he asked. 'Has Jane put you up to this?'

'What do you mean, Martin?'

'Has she asked you to do this?'

'Never—never once. Ah, Martin, Martin, how little you know her!'

'Then it's all your own fancyin'?'

'All my own, every word my own.'

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'Then, look here, mother.' Martin stooped and laid a hand on his mother's arm. 'Let it just stay at that. Believe me you're at your old game of worryin' about nothin', and what's worse, you're interferin' where you're not wanted. You'll forgive me sayin' it, but I'm not the only one has used plain talk this evenin'. You may be right, you may be wrong, either way it's not your affair. If Jane has anythin' to complain about, I'm always here to listen; if I have a word to say, she's there to hear it. But if it'll save you worryin', I may tell you just this, so long as Jane's content, I am—an' there's an end of it.' He stood upright again and, hands clasped behind his back, looked down from the height of his arrogant masterfulness upon his old mother, shrinking now in her low-backed chair. 'You hear me?'

'Yes, Martin.'

'An' you understand?'

'Yes, Martin.'

'That's right. An' now let's talk about somethin' sensible.'

So they talked of things sensible, and the Mother, understanding perfectly, interfered

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openly no more. No doubt she had chosen her occasion badly, most likely she had said more than she had ever meant to say; nevertheless she had acted for the best, and doubtless Martin was sorry within an hour that he had treated her with such harshness.

He was more than sorry before very long. For one day in early autumn-time the Mother was called, and she lay down and died. Her end was peaceful. Just as the hour struck, she commended Jane and Martin to the care of Him who knoweth and ordereth all things; then she blessed them, and with their hands in hers sank confidently upon sleep. So went out that gentle soul, and Jane and Martin were left alone.

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CHAPTER XII

THE Mother's going, timely though it was, left a great void in the little world of Hillside; a void none the less real because of the living presence that lingered in it, and was almost palpable. She was gone; but her presence was there, full and constant, making of the house, so empty else of all save gloom and silence, a very temple of living memories. There she sat, for all that her body had gone, there beyond the table or here beside the lamp, her head bowed over her busy hands, face wrinkled placidly or bright with its ready smile. Hush. Was that her foot sounding upon the stair; was that her voice rising through the silence, soft and cheerfully? Surely did Martin go quietly into the parlour, going as in the old days of marauding boyhood, he would find her in the wicker chair and she would turn to smile him welcome; or, mayhap, she was working in the pantry, or

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standing by the bread-tray in the kitchen? It was strange. He knew she had gone; yet there he went stealthily from room to room, expectant almost, searching, you might think, for something he had lost.

Was she lost? Had she really gone? asked Jane of herself, so lonely now with one sorrow the more in her little world. Surely not. Why her face was there . . . and there . . . and there. She was gone upon a journey, a little pilgrimage out into the world, from which she must surely return. How think of her as really dead, laid away, gone utterly? Dead? Surely not. Yet what in life was more certain? Out there beyond the hills the Mother lay at peace—close by a narrow mound in shadow of the yews—and of her was left only memories and a name. Ah, but life was woeful, thought Jane, come once more and so soon to clear vision of life's grim tragedy; ah, but death was terrible. Old and young, death claimed all for its own in its own strange time. . . . Yet if God called, even to the young, was it not well? Was it not well?

So, for a while, dark clouds hung heavy over Hillside, and beneath them all went

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wearily in a common bond of sorrow; then lifted slowly and drifted away, time compelling them and scattering. Martin ceased his wandering from room to room, learned to forget, grew careless again in his ways and often uncertain. Day after day, this one narrower than that as the path of the sun grew shorter, Jane sought consolation in work; night after night, so long now and lonely, she sat by the lamp, thinking and working, always thinking.

Indeed she had much food for thought; much opportunity to give thought play. She had merely to look back across the months, to catch sight of a little work-basket, to turn eyes upon Martin sitting behind his newspaper or glance at his empty chair; only to look inwards upon herself and thoughts came crowding. How much had happened within a year; what changes come, hopes blighted. Think of last winter, and think of this: as like as day was like night. Ah, could but those old evenings come back again! She recalled them all; lived them one by one. She had but to shut her eyes and there sat the Mother by the table, a white shawl about her shoulders, a lace cap on her hair; there sat Martin, reading

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or listening, feet outstretched and smoke rising from his pipe; there sat herself—yes, her very self—knitting before the fire, so happy, so content. See them go, those mellow evenings. The faces, the faces . . . the softened light . . . the voices rising . . . the coals falling in the fender, the wind plucking at the shutter, the rain splashing from the spout, a sound of the Mother singing, of Martin laughing, of needles clicking softly as they flashed. Such pleasant evenings, such peace and happiness; all well in the world and the future all brightness. . . .

And now? Ah, the miles of difference! There was a lifetime between now and then, a whole lifetime of miserable change. She felt years older. When she closed eyes and looked back upon herself, it was almost a stranger she saw; when she opened eyes and looked out of herself, it was into a new world. Nothing was the same; nothing ever again could be the same. Away back there, so far back, were the old bright days; there, down there, lay those miserable months; here and now was the weary present. Ah, it was dreary; and it was very lonely. The days

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went slowly, the nights were endless. It seemed to be always raining. Few came to see her. She had no heart to go visiting. Work, work; a little rest; a long sleep; a new day; another night: so ran life in this wintry weather. Indeed it was very lonely. So still the house was; not a sound, not a breath save her own, not a word spoken for hours. . . .

Why did not Martin come? Why did he go out so much? Where did he go? Did business call him always? Why did he sit silent often, frown sometimes when she spoke and answer gruffly? Why did he come laughing up through the fields, cease laughing on the threshold, and stride in without a word? Why did he grumble so much over trifles, if dinner was not ready to the minute, if the kitchen was untidy or the parlour not swept? He used to be different. Was it his fault, or hers, or was it because of the change in everything? Ah, she wished he would come home; she wished he could be his old self; she wished —wished—wished. . . .

What was the use of wishing?

The winter dragged slowly through; and

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one evening in early spring came Hannah to Hillside. She looked radiant; youth flushing on her cheeks, happiness kindling in her eyes. 'Jane,' she called; then tripped into the parlour lightsome as a bird. 'Dear Jane,' she said; 'ah, Jane, my dear.' It was good to see her face; good to have sound of her merry chattering. In a while she looked about the room. 'Where's Martin?' she asked.

He was at Bunn, Jane answered.

'Such a man!' Up went Hannah's hands. 'He's always somewhere. What does he do with himself at all? Faith, if he belonged to me, I'd—' She broke off abruptly; pulled her chair nearer to Jane's, leant and whispered something in her ear.

'Nonsense!'

'It's true, I tell ye.' Hannah's face was crimson.

'And when?' asked Jane, her own cheeks flushing.

'Three weeks. It was all settled last night Only last night. There wasn't an angry word, not one. All of a sudden it happened. There wasn't time to send for you and Martin. Hannah flung up her hands. 'Aw, Lord o'

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mercy, all there is to do. Dresses and skirts, shoes and hats, orderin' and preparin', cookin' and bakin'—ah, how are we to get through it all? . . . You 'll have to help us, Jane. You will, won't ye? It makes me think of your own affair. Lord, the time that was! Ye mind it, don't ye?'

Jane nodded. She remembered well.

'I 'm to be all in white, with a bonnet and veil and buckled shoes. I 'll have flowers. There 'll be a carriage. We 're goin' to ask every one. Maybe we 'll go to Kyle for a week or maybe to Dublin. . . . Think of it, Jane! Think of the way ye felt yourself.'

Jane smiled. She remembered how she had felt herself.

'Only'—Hannah looked archly at Jane, laughed and shook her curls—'there 'll be no capers wi' me when the mornin' comes. Himself 's not goin' to find *me* among the cabbage-stalks. Heavens above, Jane, d' ye mind that time? D' ye mind the things I said to ye? Ye were mad.'

Jane smiled again. Yes; she had been mad.

'Suppose he had taken ye at your word,'

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Hannah went on, irrepressible as a lark. 'Why it 'd have been terrible. Think of what you 'd have missed! Everything, everything'; and Hannah looked about the room.

What could Jane say? Think of what she would have missed, indeed.

'But never heed that now,' cried Hannah. 'All that 's past and gone. I 'm full o' myself this minute. I could fly—I could fly. The heart 's dancin' in me. Lord, the day it is! I must talk—I must, I must. Lord o' mercy, all there is to do!'

Once again, then, was Gorteen agog. The hearths buzzed with gossip. Sam Mires walked a round-backed hero. Hannah's name flew winged from door to door. The Fallons' cottage stood as centre of a hill-ringed universe. Every day some one knocked at the green door, and was received in the little parlour by Hannah and Maria; every night some one came into the kitchen, wished Miss Hannah well, and laid a homely present at her feet. Once again a sound of congratulation rose among the tombstones, of soft flattery between the counters of Bunn town. All Gorteen was alive with expectation; in

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the Fallons' was constant bustle of preparation. Jane's affair had been splendid; Hannah's promised to eclipse even that. Now was no cloud of foolish uncertainty on the horizon; the whole sky was clear and sure. No fear in life of Hannah spoiling sport, of leading a dance across the fields on the blissful morning. She was willing and eager, joyous as she flitted from room to room, and from counter to counter, as any bird. It was a pleasure to watch her; she was so bright and friendly, said one to another, that the heart melted in sight of her face. Ah, God be with her. Ah, might the angels guard her. The lucky man was Sam Mires. A hundred times a better wife she would make him than that sighing creature of a Jane. Think of the bride *she* made. Think of the doleful company she must be for himself the Squire. Ah, now—now.

Jane was not doleful during those three weeks. Sometimes maybe she sat quiet whilst Hannah chattered—on the way back from hearing the banns read, on the long road to the emporiums of Glann and Clogheen—she thinking possibly of like journeys in days

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that were gone; also, at times, when Hannah sprang joyfully into the future, she may have shook her head and sighed; nor is it unlikely that more than once she was moved, in the full glare of Hannah's happiness, to look thoughtfully back in quest of her old self, the Jane of two years ago, the Jane who strove and doubted so much, and in the end yielded to Martin the Conqueror, her shining Martin, beside whom this dulcet Mires was but a pigmy: but these were only passing shadows on a time of sunshine. In her quiet way she enjoyed all that came, even those weary journeys through mist and starlight, those eternal preparations by hearth and table. It brought diversion, made a welcome break in the long monotony of things. Every day brought something new; beyond every evening lay a full to-morrow. It was good to see Hannah's face as she went flitting like a bee, to hear Maria pour forth motherly counsel, to see Red Hugh stepping clumsily among the flower-beds, and Sam Mires coming softly, like some hero in a story-book, through the twilight; good also to have Martin stride in of an evening—just as of old; oh, just as of old

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—make merry awhile with Hugh and Big Ned by the kitchen hearth, then walk home beside her beneath the stars. Just as of old; oh, just as of old!

So time went; and when at last the great morning came—Hannah's one morning in a lifetime—Jane adorned herself, not gaily but with sober richness, entered by the green doorway and played her modest part among the festive company gathered in kitchen and parlour; mounted the gig and was whirled away to Drumhill; knelt humbly by Martin in the old dim church, and prayed from her heart that the Almighty might lead Hannah in the path of happiness; just glanced between the yews as she walked towards the gate, just looked at Martin and saw themselves—their old selves and hand-in-hand—go down the long road between spring hedges, just tightened her lips as they spun past Hillside, and she saw the Mother standing there in her flowered silk; then went in between the flower-beds, seated herself in the parlour, and made merry with the rest.

Why, it was like living again that other day in the spring of two years ago; like, and yet

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unlike—every one a little older, a face or two missing, herself and Martin not now in the seats of honour—yet the same faces glowing along the table, the same horny hands plying eagerly, the same jokes, toasts, healths, the same clatter and bustle, heartiness and good humour. There is Big Ned booming in the kitchen, there Long John mocking him; now Miss Hicks empties her plate into her lap, and the parlour rings; now Red Hugh lets slip a chicken upon the floor, and the parlour roars. . . .

Hush. Martin is on his feet. How well he speaks; how big and comely he is; how much like that other Martin. . . .

Hush. Sam Mires is rising to respond, a hand toying with his flowing whiskers. How Sam is oiled and curled; how puny a man he is compared with Martin the big and glorious; how softly he speaks, mincing and tripping, saying just the same foolish things. . . .

What. Surely Sam will not refer to that again, that matter of the Snowdrop? Yes; there it comes, pat and sure. How foolish of him. How cruel of all to raise their glasses and shout her name. It makes her tremble

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and shrink into herself. It brings back the past so vividly. It is like living again that other day in another spring. 'Snowdrop Jane,' they cry. Ah, no, no. . . .

One afternoon, in the week following Hannah's marriage, Jane put on an old rush hat, went through the fields, and coming to a hazel clump that stood in a hollow of the hills, hid herself there from sight of the sun. It was a placid hour in a day of spring weather. Hardly a sound moved upon the hills. Only the birds or a wandering butterfly stirred among the tender leaves. In the moss beneath the hedge that ran beyond the hazels, late violets drooped among the primroses; and the whitethorn above them was patched with bloom. Everywhere was spread a great peace, fresh and beautiful; everywhere but in Jane's simple heart. She looked troubled. Her eyes were pensive. Wearily she sat within the shade, knees upgathered and hands clasped around them, staring at thought.

She was thinking of the past, looking back upon it in light of the present; *What had been* linked close with *What was*, and both

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lying vivid before her, there in the shade where primrose and violet sprung. For days she had been so thinking and seeing, each day with greater clearness; now her eyes were wide.

She saw herself as two years ago she had been; saw Martin also as two years ago he had been; now here was Martin, here herself —both how changed. Then they had been happy, joined blessedly together, Martin all graciousness, herself all trust: now they stood apart, some dread thing between them, Martin silent and morose, herself silent and afraid. Such a change!

She had changed; but not towards Martin, or only in so far as he willed it. Still she cared for him as of old; still admired him, still thought of him as the one man in the world, the man whom she had vowed to serve with her life till death. Altogether she was his to do with as he willed. He had only to hold up a finger and she was there at his feet. Only he did not. Rather was it that he put out his hands and pushed her away—back—back—not wanting her, not caring.

He did not want her now. She knew it.

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Every word, every look, proved it. He avoided her, found pleasure everywhere but in her company; and if he cared at all gave no sign of caring. His hands were out pushing her away.

Once it had not been so. She remembered that morning two years ago when he came claiming; remembered many mornings and evenings before that time, and many since. His words, looks, were living still; himself as he then was. . . . Or was he himself now? Were all those promises and vows, those pleadings, only seeming? Had he never cared? Had he married her just for miserable money, caring for herself not a jot? Had her heart spoken true in that old time of doubt and trouble? Did she know now what she had felt then, what, despite herself, she had sometimes felt since: that guineas were her value in his eyes? '*Make it guineas*,' he had said. Ah, she remembered so well.

Yes; she knew now; God help her, she knew only too well! Why, it was plain as day. Never had he felt for her a spark of real affection. All had been false from the first. A while he had endured her, a while

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had shown her a smiling face: now he was himself at last, the real Martin.

Could it be true? Oh, surely not. She was but dreaming horribly, and would wake again to happiness in a world all sunshine. Martin could not act so, could not be so? Her Martin, her big glorious Martin! He had only grown older and quieter; was concerned overmuch about worldly things; was grown maybe a little careless, was waiting maybe till she was quite herself again. Maybe so. Maybe so. . . .

Ah, she knew he had much to bear. The world was a hard taskmaster. Since the Mother went she herself had given him much cause for complaint. Somehow, the house would look untidy, meals would be late; somehow, she could not always find pleasure in her work. She had been negligent, selfish. She had strayed from duty. Too often she had knelt praying only with her lips, forgetting to ask help from above, neglecting her duty to God, to Martin and herself. She had gone astray. She must do better; must pray without ceasing; must turn a new face to Martin. Yes; she must do better. And

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maybe she . . . Maybe Martin . . . Maybe . . . Maybe. . . .

Jane rose, went out into the sunshine, and slowly passed through the fields towards home. Her face was brighter now, her step not so heavy. She found pleasure in sight of the brooding fields, the snowy hedges, the sky so blue in the great depth of it, the earth spread so graciously beneath the sun. Maybe she . . . Maybe Martin . . . Ah, maybe, maybe. . . .

All the afternoon she worked eagerly, her face bright with hope; then, night having come, stole out through the porch, along the pathway, and joined Martin where he leant upon the fence that bordered the lawn. He turned at sound of her step, mumbled a word, and went on smoking.

Jane rested her arms upon the rail and, cheek in hand, looked out across the sleeping fields.

'Ah, the lovely night it is,' sighed she; 'so quiet—so quiet. Not a sound is there, nothing but loneliness in the big empty world. All the stars there are, millions an' millions! An' the lovely freshness there is in the air; an' the

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smell of hawthorn! Ah, it's beautiful—beautiful.'

Martin said nothing.

'It makes me think of Kyle; only there's no sea moanin' down there.' Jane nodded towards the valley and the mists folded within it. 'Doesn't it you, Martin?'

'Ay, maybe it does.'

'It makes me think of the old days when we used to stand by the gate, an' you were biddin' me good-bye. There were nights then just like this—ay, just like this.' Jane turned. 'Ye mind them, Martin?'

'Hm.' Martin blew a stream of smoke towards the stars. 'Ay, maybe I do.'

'Ah, they were lovely nights—lovely—lovely! I wish . . .' Jane came nearer and put her arm in Martin's. 'Ah, Martin, couldn't we be now as we used to be then?' She peered round pleadingly into his face. 'Ah, Martin dear, why couldn't we?'

Martin turned slowly. In the dim light he could just see Jane's face, upturned and pale, beside him. He frowned a little; then, without speaking, moved a step away.

'I 've been thinkin' about it, Martin, thinkin'

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all day long; an' for days I 've been livin' those old times over again. I want them back again—ah, I want them back again!' Again Jane drew close, her arm linked in Martin's, her face near his. 'Listen, Martin. I know I 've been at fault—ah, I know it well. I 've given ye every cause to complain. I 've been selfish. I 've neglected my duty. I haven't tried to please ye or to be what I ought to be. . . . But I 'll alter, Martin. I 'll strive my best. I 'll be as I used to be. See, Martin, see; I 'm altered now. . . .'

Martin drew away; turned his back toward the fence, and leaning his elbows upon it looked askance at Jane, standing solitary now beside the path.

'What's all this danged nonsense about?' asked he, his voice like a breath of frost in summer-time.

Jane stood silent, face down, arms hanging limp.

'Can't a man come out for a quiet smoke without bein' troubled like this?' His voice was harsh; suddenly it grew scornful. 'You an' your *used to be!* You an' your *old times!* As if wishin' could bring them back.' He

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laughed. 'Ah, yes, indeed. As if all the wishin' and prayin' in life could bring them back!'

Jane said nothing. Martin paused a minute; went on:

'An' what's this I hear about complaints an' selfishness, an' all the rest? Who's been complainin'? Have I?' He faced Jane. 'Come. Have I?'

'No, Martin.'

'Who, then?'

'No one, Martin. I only——'

'What? Come. Speak out.'

'I was thinkin', Martin, that maybe ye were dissatisfied wi' me.'

'Ah, thinkin'! Always thinkin'. Always imaginin' things.' Then Martin's voice softened, and he stepped to Jane and laid a hand upon her shoulder. 'Look here, Jane; don't be inventin' trouble for yourself, I advise you. There's plenty lyin' ready about the world without doin' that. Stop thinkin', like a good woman, an' learn sense. You won't find Heaven on the hillsides, an' there's no carpet spread for us on the stones.' He swayed Jane to and fro—just as he had swayed her so often

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before—with his masterful hand. 'You hear me?'

'I—I do, Martin.'

'An' don't be callin' yourself names, I ask you. There's plenty in the world ready to do you that service. An' don't come worryin' me any more with your romancin'. When I tell you you're neglectin' your duty, or bein' selfish, *then* 'll be time enough to fret.' Again he swayed Jane to and fro. 'You understand?'

It was the old way of talking, of evading the point. But now Jane was awake.

'Ah, no, no,' she cried, spreading wide her arms. 'It's not that, it's not that! It's the change that's come over us. It's what's come between us. Ye don't care for me now as ye used to care. Your voice is different and your looks. Nothin''s the same, nothin' at all. . . .'

Martin drew back, muttering as he went; but Jane followed quick, clutching at his arm.

'You're tired of me,' she cried. 'You're weary of me!'

Martin stopped, clenched tight his hands; and answered recklessly:

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'Well, God knows I am,' said he; 'weary to death.'

'I knew it.' Jane's hands dropped. Slowly she turned and stood looking across the fields. 'I knew it,' she repeated; and again, 'I knew it.'

She was giving Martin's words their widest meaning, telling herself that not just then, but always and in everything, he was weary of her; yet Martin made no protest. Why indeed should he protest? One way or the other, broad meaning or narrow, it mattered little. He rapped the ashes from his pipe upon the rail; thrust hands in pockets and stood spraddled upon the path, carelessly waiting.

'You 've always been weary,' said Jane in a while, not angrily but mournfully, as if to herself. 'Ye never cared.'

'Maybe so,' said Martin.

'Ye cared nothin' when ye married me. Ye didn't want me: 'twas the money.'

'Maybe so,' said Martin.

'Ye never cared. An' now——'

A minute Jane stood silent, a finger on her lips, her eyes fixed as if looking into the future;

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then, with a smothered cry, turned and went back towards the house. But when she had gone only a little way, Martin called to her.

'Jane.'

Maybe she heard; but she walked on.

'Jane.'

Still did that little black figure go slowly along the path, not pausing or answering; so Martin ceased calling, turned, and walked away. 'Maybe it's as well,' said he. 'Maybe it is. 'Twas bound to come, I suppose. Still, God knows I pity her. . . . Why couldn't she be content? Why couldn't she stop her thinkin' and imaginin'; just take life as it comes, like another, an' be content? She has all she wants. She has . . . Ah, women are not to be understood,' said Martin. 'They 're unknowable.'

Leaving the pathway, he went down the avenue, turned at the gates towards Armoy, and idly went sauntering along. Sometimes he stopped to look at the sky, or to strike a match, or to ponder a thought with his face to the dust. At Armoy crossway he lingered a while; then, aimlessly as ever, you might

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think, started again, and at a quicker pace went uphill towards Leemore. On he went, past Ned Noble's house and the Priest's cottage, past the bog-pass and the misty flats, on past the schoolhouse to Leemore crossway; and there turned for home. He met no one. Not a sound stirred among the hills. Here and there a candle shone in a distant cottage. And as he passed the schoolhouse, both going and coming, all that caught his eye in its great square front was the narrow window with its buff blind that gleamed beyond the pillars of the porch.

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CHAPTER XIII

DURING that summer, Martin slackened rein and made for the old free paths; slowly at first, then speedily, at last headlong. Nothing daunted him, neither thought nor memory, present cares nor future chances. He broke vows and promises; forgot the Mother and his dead child. The sight of Jane and her reproachful face only drove him faster. The claims of Hillside weighed with him no longer. Red Hugh and his counsels he spurned with a laugh. All the bounty of those hopeful summers—only three at the most—he scattered to the winds, and clattered on.

It was a wet season, full of mists and floods, the hills sodden to the roots, the lowlands dank and blighted. Men stood forlorn under pitiless skies, waiting by stricken fields for God to stay the rigour of His hand. Gorteen murmured rebelliously; Drumhill and Armoy

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sighed patiently; round many a hearthstone tongues wagged foreboding, and haggard eyes peered through the smoke out upon the long array of hungry months; only in Hillside, one might say, was any show of heedlessness. Why should the Squire care? The more it rained, the easier the fields in hunting-time.

When money was needed, Martin sold cattle, or mortgaged a field. Soon all Jane's fortune came back to him, and was scattered again. On market-days he spent freely in the public-houses and lunched at the hotel. Often he entertained friends in the parlour; Jane sitting timid among them, or lying weary in the darkness filled with the noise of revelry. In August he spent a week in Dublin at the horse show; came back with new clothes, whips, saddles, and a hunter. Hardly a day saw him at home; whole nights he gave to diversion. He ceased working, ceased planning and striving; left Hillside to the mercies of the rain. Openly he never discredited himself, never drank to excess or kept bad company; and whilst the many gave him countenance, the few who saw clearly and to the end dared nothing in the way of

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rebuke. At home and abroad he went his own masterful way, spite of friend or foe.

One day in autumn-time, however, as he watched the men gather in some wreck of crop, Hugh Fallon, finding counsel useless, faced him boldly and spoke his mind. He was the talk of the countryside, said Hugh, voice ringing defiantly, eyes flashing scorn. Had he no thought, no respect for self or name, no fear of God in his eyes? Did he not see what was coming? Look at the wasting fields; see the crop, the cattle, the home, that were his. Hunters and saddles and gigs, himself standing there in breeches and leggings, drinking and gambling, gadding through fairs and swaggering to races; was it for this his father had laboured and his mother striven? Think of them lying in their graves, shamed by the man they had pride in! Think of Jane, his wife, spending her days in loneliness and neglect, disgraced because of him! 'Shame upon ye, Martin Hynes,' cried Hugh, at last, pointing a rigid finger; 'an' may shame fall hard upon ye for all your doin's. For yourself I care nothin'. Go your ways. But for the sake of them

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that's gone, an' for the sake of her that's married to ye, I tell ye that your ways are hateful to me. Always I mistrusted ye; now—now I scorn ye.'

Martin stepped forward, his hands clenched. 'You reptile,' he said. 'You creepin' reptile!' He raised an arm. 'By God, I——'

'Keep God's name from your lips,' answered Hugh; 'an' keep your names an' your threats for your breed.'

'Get from my fields,' shouted Martin; 'get from my sight before I have your blood! An' so long as you've breath never tempt me wi' sight o' your face.'

'I take your word,' answered Hugh; then turned and went. And from that day he and Martin passed each other by in black silence; nor did a Fallon enter Hillside doorway.

So Martin went his ways; and Jane had a burden the more to bear. She bore it patiently, accepting it as she accepted all else in life. What had to be had to be, she said, and meekly submitted. Ever since that long night of her realisation, and that longer day following it of her temptation, when, wrestling hard in the sunshine and peace of the fields,

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she had at last conquered herself and come back to duty; since then she had quit striving and lived unexpectant. For a while, indeed, during summer-time, she had tried to lure Martin back with sight of the old face; again, when summer was declining and Martin's ways grew bolder, patiently had tried to convert Martin to righteousness; and either time had been repulsed, pushed roughly back and scorned. It was hard; still duty must be done. Even if Martin were weary of her, even if they were no more now than man and woman living under the same roof; yet she had vowed, and vows must be kept as in the very sight of God. Who was she to rebel, or complain; what were her trials compared with those of many in the world, ay, even in the little world around her? She had health and a home; could work and rest, watch and pray. At its worst life had still its memories, its pastures of the spirit. She remembered—she remembered. And withal no day was entirely barren. Something was always happening. Martin was not unkind. She liked to see him gay, was hurt when he frowned; had pride in him as he drove off in the gig, or stood arrayed

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in the yard beside his horse. So big and masterful he was. Even his anger thrilled her pleasantly. She feared—she dreaded: yet never in her heart did she despair, or neglect commending her Martin to the grace of God. And always did religion sustain and comfort her; that beautiful religion, so abidingly sure, the outward manifestation of which, in her, was a grave serenity, the inward an invincible patience.

Throughout the winter, in the intervals of diversion, Martin saw much and thought much of Kate Trant. Placed as they were, living almost on neighbouring hills within the narrow bounds of Gorteen, it was natural that he should see much of her, and in a measure think; but not in just the way that now was his. When he married Jane he put Kate outside his life; afterwards he allowed her to intrude a little, then to wander at leisure; now she stayed constantly in a place almost empty of Jane, a place dreary enough and strewn with ashes of many kindlings. Without any striving, against his wish maybe and certainly against his nature, gradually, insidiously, the change had come; circumstances doing their

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part, time working subtly, memories helping, the joys of possession fading within sight of the desirable. Jane was always here—eternally here; Kate always there—unattainably there.

At church, in the rare mornings that found him there, he glanced often at Kate as she stood among the choir; of Sabbath evenings kept Jane company in Leemore only, you might think, to have sight of Kate, singing near the preacher or kneeling on the tiles. Often, on the way to and from diversion, he went round past the schoolhouse, just to look across the hedge or to nod, as to some one beyond it, at the narrow buff blind. Sometimes, on meeting her—on Bunn pavement, by the church gates—he would stop and speak an awkward word; sometimes would flush and hurry past as her eyes met his and turned away. Once or twice, during the winter, he visited the school, assuming high interest in things educational; once or twice, took his old place by the kitchen hearth, and, whilst Kate laboured in the porch room, talked restlessly to her mother; repeatedly he made hurried journey beneath the stars, from Hillside to Leemore crossways, ponder-

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ing as he went and lingering a while by the school gateway. Kate showed him no favour. The nearer he came the more she seemed unattainable. But what of that? Like a moth he went circling; and the feebler burned the flame, drawing back and back, the more it lured.

In the spring an Orange meeting was held in Leemore, and Martin spoke. Kate sat before the rostrum, dressed in black with red about her throat; beside her two swains, wearing sashes and rosettes, who were rivals for her hand. During the earlier proceedings —the tea-drinking, the performance of the local band, the Rector's address, the flights of True Blue oratory—Kate was all animation; but at sight of Martin stepping upon the rostrum, she fell dour and sat frigid as a stone. Why did she change? thought Martin, his eyes quick upon her face. Why did she sit just there; she and those gaping louts? Afire with sudden jealousy, he spread his arms and spoke as to her alone. But she sat like a stone.

Again, at the July meeting, held that year in Drumhill, Martin spoke; and again did

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Kate, standing in the crowd that thronged the hilltop, give him sober hearing, her lips set, face cold and averted. Not once did she raise her eyes, not once join in the applause that swelled so generously. Why was she there? Why did she treat him so? He saw her alone, spoke as if she alone stood upon the hilltop. She drew him, lured him; yet repulsed him utterly. Why? Why? Aflame with passion, he left the platform and sought her; and found her at last in the festive crowd that, to sound of drum and fife, went streaming down the hill. Around her tramped the stalwarts of Gorteen, above her waved the True Blue banner; beside her, one on either hand, marched the faithful swains, adorned and glorious. He caught her arm.

'Kate,' said he; 'I say, Kate.'

She looked round, plucked away her arm; walked on.

'Kate,' pleaded Martin. 'One word—just one.'

The swains looked back, lurching and grinning. 'Good man, Squire,' shouted they. 'More power, me son. Come under the

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flag, boy. Room there in front for the Squire.'

One of them made room. Martin stepped to Kate's side. Quickly she slipped away, and left him beneath the flag.

It was worse than a blow. Flaring with anger, Martin strode away, ready now for any madness.

Through a month he restrained himself, striving maybe for possession the while his madness grew; then, one August night of darkness and rain, broke away, and went to Leemore, there to make an end. Why he went, or for what, he did not know; and did not care. Recklessly he went, blind, unthinking, driven by his devil.

In the kitchen, Kate's mother sat by the hearth, supping gruel from a bowl. As Martin entered, she bade him welcome and rose to fetch a chair.

'I 'm not sittin',' he said abruptly. 'I want to see Kate.'

'But you 'll be wet, Martin. Sure you 'll rest a while?'

'I 'm not sittin'. Tell Kate I 'm here,' said Martin; then turned, and strode along the

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passage into the schoolroom, and sat him in the rostrum.

Around him lay heavy darkness, quickened only by a glimmer of light that stole through the passage doorway and died into gloom among the desks. Beyond, the rain beat upon the windows; nearer, the wind soughed in the chimney-place; a shuffle of footsteps crept along the passage, the light brightening as they came, and stopped at the porch door; then came a murmur of voices, a sudden silence, a quick stir of footsteps. Light flashed into the darkness. The door closed. Hastily Martin rose and stepped upon the tiles.

'Ah, Kate; it 's you. I knew you 'd come.'

Without answering, or taking his hand, Kate passed him by, set the candle upon the rostrum and turned. She was dressed in black, with linen collar and cuffs. Her hair fell loosely about her high forehead. Her lips were set; her face was pale and hard. Three years had aged her much; the lines about her mouth were deeper; there was grey in her hair; her eyes, once so deep and kindly, were cold. She looked at Martin

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steadily, a hand upon the candlestick, the other clenched by her side.

'Well,' she asked. 'What is it?'

Martin came nearer and gripped an edge of the slope, swaying as he stood. He too was pale, and his eyes shone.

'Kate,' said he. 'I want to tell you. I had to come.' He paused, giving Kate chance to speak; but she stood silent. 'I had to come. Something drove me. I want—' What did he want? He came a step nearer. 'I want—I want you to help me. You will help me?' he said. 'Ah, say you will.'

Kate stepped into the rostrum and sat down. A cane lay on the slope; she lifted it and laid it upon her lap, holding it by both ends. Martin watched her for a minute; then slowly paced this way and that across the ring of candle light; then wheeled and faced her, words hot on his tongue.

'I 'm miserable,' he cried, flinging out his arms. 'I 'm mad: but I can't help myself. For weeks I 've been fightin' myself, tryin' to keep away . . . an' it 's no use. I 'm driven. You 're always drawin' me. The less I see of you, the more I want to see you. The

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harder you are, the more I want you. Every hour I 'm thinkin' of you. . . .'

Kate rose; but Martin waved her down.

'Listen,' he cried. 'I bid you to listen.' He stamped on the tiles. 'Sit down; sit down an' hear me.' He bent across the rostrum, strong and passionate; and from him Kate shrank back against the wall, the cane raised as if to strike. Then Martin laughed and drew away.

'Have no fear,' he said, his voice sobering quickly. 'Bad as I am, I 'm not come to that yet. Even beyond'; and he nodded towards Hillside; 'I 'm no more than a dog that barks.' He laughed again. 'Ay, I 'm the dog; and *she's* the cat. Oh, a pretty pair.' He fell once more to pacing up and down, from gloom to gloom across the ring of light, face to the tiles and hands clasped behind him; his voice rising harsh and edged with bitterness. 'There we are, ever and always, tied by the neck like stray goats, one pullin' this way, th' other that. When I lift my eyes at the table there she is; when I speak she answers; if I 'm silent she waits. Ay, she waits—always waits. Never a laugh in the

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house, never a pleasant word; nothin' but prayin' an' sighin' from mornin' to night, nothin' but tight lips an' her face like chalk. If I 'm angry she cowers; if I 'm merry she shivers; I believe she 'd take a blow like a present. . . .'

Of a sudden, Martin halted before the rostrum and swung round. Kate sat leaning forward, elbows on the slope and face between her palms, the cane lying before her.

'I 'm weary of her,' cried Martin, flinging up his hands. 'I 'm sick to death. If she 'd only face me an' speak her mind, only show there was blood in her, I 'd understand: but this everlastin' patience maddens me. It 's all pretence. I know she hates me. I know she 's only chokin' down her feelin's. I 'd swear half her prayin 's only hypocrisy. Prayin'—prayin'—prayin'! What 's the good of that? What 's come of it all; an' what 's likely to come? Did it keep the child from dyin'? Did it keep the old Mother——?'

Kate rose quickly.

'Stop,' she cried. 'Oh, for God's sake, stop!'

Martin let fall his hands; stooped a little, and stood looking at Kate across the candle.

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'Stop what?' he asked.

'All this foolishness—this madness. How can you do it? D'you think I want to know? It's nothing to me.'

'It's everything to you.'

'It's nothing. You have no right—no right. I'll hear no more.'

'But you'll have to hear.'

'I won't—I won't,' cried Kate; and tried to go. But Martin hindered her; then leant his arms upon the rostrum, and bent across them.

'Look here, Kate,' said he. 'I've said more than I ought, an' I'm sorry; but I want you to know that it's all been a mistake. Three years ago I played the fool; an' now I'm punished. You've got your revenge, girl; you've got your revenge.'

What could Kate say or do? She wanted to go and could not; wanted to speak and found words vain. Moaning helplessly, she leant back against the wall, eyes closed, fingers clutched upon the cane. Martin pushed his arms forward and bent lower over them, his eyes eager on Kate's face.

'Why did you listen to me that night?

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Why did you let me go? If you'd only held up a finger, I'd have stayed. But you didn't. Why didn't you, Kate? Didn't you care?'

Kate sat quiet and silent, like a bird before its captor, without courage or way of escape.

'Didn't you care, Kate? Haven't you cared since? Haven't you been sorry? Aren't you sorry now?'

Slowly Hynes made question, his voice suave, his eyes burning; closer before him, in helpless silence, her brow puckered slightly, her lips twitching, and her fingers writhing about the cane, Kate shrank against the wall.

'Ah, I know you cared. I know you were sorry. Haven't I seen it in your face. . . . Kate, 'twas all a mistake. We ought never to have parted. You were the one woman for me—the one woman in the world. I knew it then. I know it now. My God, I know it well!'

Standing upright, Hynes turned and looked into the gloom, tragically, as into the depths of fate; then, stamping his foot, turned again and stooped over the rostrum.

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'An' now it's too late,' he said; 'too late . . . too late.'

His voice sank low; his eyes gleamed hungrily.

'Why are you so hard, Kate? Why do you turn from me? What about the world; what about anything but ourselves? . . . Kate. Let me look at you. Ah, girl, girl!'

Then of a sudden blind passion mastered him; and he stretched his arms and cried:

'I can't do without you. Day an' night I keep thinkin' of you. These months I have longed for you. You draw me, an' draw me.' Bending far over the rostrum, he spread his arms. 'Kate, come to me. Ah, girl, girl! I 'll do anything. I 'll go anywhere. . . . Ah, but you must. I 've got you now, an'. . . .'

Drunken with passion and shouting loud, he rounded the rostrum and clutched at Kate's arm; and at that Kate struck him with the cane, quick and hard, across the face.

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CHAPTER XIV

BAFFLED and driven, Hynes tramped along the pathway, kicked viciously at the gate as it swung before him; stood a minute on the road, then turned abruptly and went striding towards Drumhill, straight on between the dripping hedges. The weal upon his face bit like fire. His blood was in a surge. He saw red through the darkness. Sometimes he stamped upon the stones; sometimes hung on his heel and shouted back. 'I 'll have you yet,' he shouted. 'Before God, I 'll have you yet!'

After a while, his mood sobered; shame crept in and weakened the grip of anger upon him; soon he turned and set his face for home.

The rain had ceased; but the sky kept heavy and black. Great clouds moved slowly before a chill wind from the mountain; the hedges shivered and hissed; right and left all

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the fields, and the hills, and the great wastes of bogland, lay sullen in the darkness, and from them came no sound, nor any glimmer of light. Only Martin was abroad, lonely in the world.

He passed the schoolhouse, blank now beyond the hedge, went down the brae, along the dismal flats; and coming to the pass that runs from road to road across Gorteen bog, turned recklessly and hurried along it, striking almost straight for home.

The track was deep in mud. His feet sank and stumbled. Only instinct kept him from the ditches that lurked darkly on either side. Once he pitched headlong upon his face; again tripped over a stake, picked it up and hastened on, cursing the path and himself and his uncertain feet. Swinging the stake, he drove it viciously at every stride, deep into the track as into a living enemy. An obstinate rage possessed him. In such a humour he would have gone through fire.

Midway between the roads, a rough foot-path, hardly to be followed in broad day, runs from the track up towards Hillside; and reaching this, Martin jumped the ditch and

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took it. No matter that dangers lurked everywhere—open bogholes, blind drains, grass-covered swamps among the willows; no matter that never before had he tried the path by night: there it lay, be it thick with scorpions, and there was he.

For a time all went well. In and out he wound across the heather and along the turf banks, jumping drains, breaking through willow clumps; sometimes on the path, sometimes groping for a way; now missing danger by a hand's-breadth, now, of a sudden and at last, right in the midst of it with his feet deep in a quivering scum of grass and peat that hid great depth of mire.

He knew the place well (locally it was known as the Cow-Trap, because of the cattle it had caught) and in sober daytime would have shunned it; but now he was fey: with an oath he plunged, straight for the bank beyond. A step and his ankles were covered; another and he sank to the knees; another and he was deep to the waist, trapped fast.

At first he struggled hard, lashing and swearing, rising, sinking, striving by brute strength to force himself free; then, finding

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strength vain and himself the deeper, fell quiet, turned, and tried to retrace his steps. Up a little, down again; a foot forward, a foot back; up, up, now this limb, now that, hands gripping the stake, arms outstretched; down, down, into the foulness and the cold, down till he stood breast high.

He rested a while, bending forward and peering through the darkness; then, stretching out the stake, drove an end down and tried to draw himself to it. Up, up, wriggling and panting; back and down with a rush as the stake gave way. A score of times he tried, this side and that; a score of times he failed: and now he stood deep to the arm-pits.

Cold and weakness gained slowly upon him. His feet hung heavy as lead. Sudden dread clutched his heart. 'My God,' he cried, 'am I to die here like a dog!' Wildly he plunged; rose; sank; flung his arms across the stake, at last, and hung upon it, panting, stricken, beaten.

'My God,' he shouted, lifting his eyes to the pitiless sky; 'my God, my God! . . . Help. Help!'

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His voice rang out, waking one here and there—Jane this side, Red Hugh that—to a minute's drowsy hearing; and echoed back from the hills. Expectantly he waited, hungering for a sound; shouted and waited, again and again. Surely some one would hear? Surely God would not let him die like that, trapped miserably like a dog?

'Help, help,' he shouted, waking Jane and Red Hugh once more, his voice piteous with fear. 'Help! Help!'

Cold and weak, he hung upon the stake, straining ear and eye in the horrible emptiness of the night. Was that a voice? Was that a light? Had no one heard? Where were the Fallons? Where was Jane?

'Jane,' he shouted, his voice so hoarse now that not even Jane might hear. 'Oh, my God, come to me! . . . Jane. Jane!'

No answer came. Around him the darkness hung impenetrable and silent as the grave, he buried there amidst it, helpless and shivering, hanging within a foot of horrible death. His voice weakened to a whisper. A surging as of the sea filled his ears. From time

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to time he struggled wildly, with a piteous feebleness; calling upon God to spare him, fighting for dear life. Once the sound of voices, coming he thought from Hillside, woke hope in him. Again a hurry of footsteps, sounding he thought upon the road behind, gave him new strength. But no one came. Drowsiness fell upon him. His head sank.

'Jane,' he whispered. 'Jane . . . Jane . . .'

The sky cleared. The darkness lightened. He raised his eyes and saw the stars, looked round and saw the hills; heard dreamy sound of voices, saw feeble glimmer of lights. He tried to shout, tried to move. Again drowsiness crept over him. Scenes of his boyhood lived and passed. Jane stood before him, bright and near; visions of the Mother and Kate Trant flitted and came. Muttering the words of a prayer, simple words asking God to make him a good obedient child, he crossed his arms, laid his forehead upon them, and in the whitening dawn of a new day went asleep.

The stars went out. The sun rose

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gloriously. Here and there the seekers went hurrying, closing in and in; came rushing together, at last, when a shout from Hugh Fallon proclaimed that the Squire was found.

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CHAPTER XV

THEY pulled him out; carried him home and up to the front bedroom; there put him down, and saying, 'God help ye both,' left him with Jane. He was just alive. All through that day and night he lay unconscious, Jane watching this side the doctor that, some one creeping up at intervals from the kitchen to whisper a word; then woke a minute and sank quickly into the raging depths of fever —depths which all thought must surely hold death. He was so weak, so fearfully racked; only God, they said, could save him. His voice filled the house, reaching to those who sat quiet in the kitchen and those who lingered on the lawn. 'God help him,' said they, imagining all that agony of strife which they could not see.

Jane watched continuously. All that he passed through she saw; all that he said she heard, even what she strove not to hear.

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She was glad when he called her name, shouting, 'Jane, come to me. Jane. Jane.' 'I'm here, Martin,' she would answer, and bend over him, praying as she soothed, praying whilst his voice changed suddenly and rambled pitilessly. 'God hear me,' she pleaded, 'and in Thy mercy spare him to me. Lord spare him this once—this once—this once!'

The weary days passed, and he did not die; the terrible hours of crisis ('the turn' folk called it in their homely way) dragged past and left him breathing; slowly he climbed back again, up out of the depths, back to consciousness of self and of the real world. But how changed he was. Could this be Squire Martin, this feeble wasted creature, with hollow eyes and long thin hands, and hardly the strength of a kitten? Could he ever be Martin again, big and strong, masterful, hearty; ever find again the old glorious life? It seemed not possible. Yet God was good, said Jane; and faithfully did her part.

His progress was slow and not sure. Sometimes he seemed on the verge of relapse. He lay like a sick child, helpless, apathetic, his

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bones burning. Often he awoke in terror, hanging it might be across a stake. And always, whatever the need, there was Jane beside him, full of sooth and care.

He used to watch her as she moved softly about the room, or sat reading by the candle, or sleeping in a chair; and wonder in a dim way at her devotion. Why should she trouble? He was worth nothing; could never be worth anything. His day was done. . . . Ah, she was very good to him. All this kindness, this patience and gentle tending, meant more than he was worth. Why was she so good? . . . Ah, if she only knew! Did she know? Had Kate whispered anything? Had he himself told? Narrowly he watched her; but neither by word nor look did she give any clue. Always she was Jane —just Jane.

One day he called her, and asked her to sit by him.

'Jane,' said he, in a while, 'why do you trouble? What makes you so good to me?'

'Good to ye?' She repeated the words softly; then looked at him smiling. 'Why, just because I must.'

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'Is it because I 'm sick—because I 'm useless?'

'It 's because you 're Martin,' answered Jane.

He lay quiet for a minute, looking at the window.

'But I 've done nothin',' said he; 'nothin' but bad. I 'm not worth a finger on your hand.'

'You 're Martin,' said Jane again.

'Ay, what 's left of me. Maybe the bad 's gone with all the rest.' He laughed; then shook his head. 'Naw, it 's there still. What 's done is done. I deserve nothin' from you. If you knew all, you 'd hate me. . . .'

'Never. Never in the world.' Jane laid a hand on his. 'Martin, ye mustn't talk like that.'

'How can I help it? I lie here thinkin' an' thinkin'—livin' through it all again. I dream about it. I look at you an' hate myself. Think of the way I treated you. . . .'

'Martin, all that 's past.' Her hand pressed his. 'Don't be thinkin' of it.'

'Ah, but I must. If you were different maybe I 'd think less. Everything that 's bad I 've been; an' now you shame me.'

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'Don't,' cried Jane. 'Ah, don't.'

'If you knew everything,' he went on, coming near confession. 'If you knew half you'd leave me to die. . . .'

'Whisht, Martin,' cried Jane. 'Ah, whisht. I won't hear. D' ye think *I*'ve done nothin'? D' ye think *my* sins don't rise up against me?'

'*You? Your sins?*' He looked at her; then laughed at his thoughts and turned his eyes. 'Ah, well,' he said, 'one gets sick an' learns. . . . Maybe we're quits. . . . Maybe it's as well.' He turned again. 'But you're sure you like bein' good to me?' he asked. 'You're sure, Jane?'

'I'm certain sure. Ah, Martin dear, don't ye know? Why, every day—' Jane paused, stopped by the thought that it was only to herself she must say how near she was sometimes to thanking God for the mercy of Martin helpless in her hands. 'Every day,' she said, 'I ask God to forgive me for bein' so happy beside ye.'

'You do, Jane? An' you think He hears you?'

'Think? I'm certain sure. Ah, God's been very good to me.'

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Thus they talked that day; and once or twice again, as the days went and Martin was stronger, they talked after that fashion, their words simple enough and on Martin's side a little hollow—hiding things, as it were, that crouched from the light—yet helping to bring them closer than in their lives before. It seemed a new Martin that lay there, strengthening with the days, placid, uncomplaining, penitent, become like a little child; it was a newer Jane—the old happier and sweeter—that sat beside him. As Martin had said, the bad might have gone with the rest of him: yet had it gone? 'Naw,' he had answered himself. 'It 's there still.' With strength came self. With time came weariness. On occasion the old Adam stirred and strove.

'Jane,' said he, one drear September afternoon, wind and rain striving in it; 'it 's no use. I 'll never get better. Somethin' tells it to me. I 'm broke for good.' He bared an arm to the elbow. 'Look at it,' he said. 'A fine thing that to be proud of.'

Jane covered the arm and gently put it down.

'You 'll be proud of it in a month,' she said. 'Twice as bad can be twice as good.'

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'Never—never. I 'm a wreck. My bones are like pulp. It 's no good,' he repeated; 'no mortal good.'

'It 's every good,' said Jane. 'Martin, it 's sinful to talk like that. It 's like flyin' in God's face. Wait a while, an' trust in Him.'

'I 've waited. I 'm weary. . . . Lord, listen to that rain!'

'It 'll go,' said Jane. 'To-morrow the sun 'll be shinin'.'

'Ay, an' mockin' me. I hate the sunshine. It—it mocks me.'

Jane sighed, and sat quiet. In a while, Martin turned to her.

'Jane, when I 'm gone——'

'Hush, Martin.'

'When I 'm gone, I say——'

'Ye mustn't, Martin.' Jane rose. 'I won't listen.'

He waved her down, with something of his old masterfulness.

'Listen to me,' he commanded. 'What 's the good of bein' afraid. . . . Well, put it like this, then: Suppose somethin' happened to me, what would you do?'

Jane sat silent, looking at her hands.

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'Answer me. What would you do?'

'I 'd— Ah, wait, wait. Martin, dear, what's the good?'

'Wait? I 'm tired waitin'. . . . Ah, you don't understand. If I rose the morrow, I 'd rise a beggar. If I died the night, I 'd leave you misery for a legacy. Listen to me,' said Martin; then, quickly and bluntly, made confession. Hillside was encumbered. Creditors stood thick around it. Years of toiling would not see it free. 'What d' you think of that?' said Martin, at last. 'There 's somethin' to lie an' think about. There 's a prospect for me or you!'

Jane said nothing. Perhaps she was not surprised.

Martin lay thinking; broke out again:

'It 's all my own fault. I 've been devilish. I had every chance. No finer inheritance ever came to man; an' I wasted it—wasted it—wasted it. Listen to the rain pourin' on it!' He lay listening, with Jane sitting patient beside him; looked round once more and put out a hand. 'Jane,' he asked softly, 'what are you goin' to do?'

'I 'll help ye, Martin.'

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'If I die, what 'll you do?'

'I 'll work, Martin.'

'You 'll not let the old place go?'

'Not whilst there 's a hand on me, Martin.'

'Thank God for that. . . . An' you could forgive me? Eh, Jane?'

'Ah, forgive! If ye died, Martin, it 's not forgiveness would bother me.'

The answer might be thought sufficient, and for Martin it was in its way; but there was one thing more, a thing which of late had stirred in him.

'But how could you get on?' he asked. 'Here all by yourself? No one to help?'

'Ah, I 'd manage,' answered Jane, brimming full with tears. 'I 'd get used to it. An' at the worst—maybe—why, maybe father 'd help me.'

There it was! For days he had been picturing just that: Jane striving, Red Hugh helping, till at last Hillside was his. The Fallons in Hillside? Red Hugh master of his fields? The prospect maddened him.

'You 'll take no help from *him*,' said Martin, with slow decision; 'he 'll put no foot here. Sooner than that I 'd have the place under the

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hammer in a week. You understand me, Jane? *He* gives you no help.'

But Jane stretched out her arms.

'Martin—Martin,' she cried; 'be generous. It's hard on us all. They care for us more than any one in the world. It's hard; it's hard. He's sorry, I know. Every day he comes askin' for you, but he never crosses the threshold. Forgive him, Martin. When he comes in the mornin' let me bring him up, an' let all be over between ye. Do, Martin; for my sake, do.'

'I'll not see him,' answered Martin, his heart set against Fallon. 'He said what no man can forgive.'

'Ah, Martin—as ye hope to be forgiven!'

'That much will have to stand against me. He'll put no foot in Hillside. You understand me?'

'Never, Martin?'

'Never. You understand my wishes?'

'I do.'

'An' you promise to heed them?'

'I do.'

Gradually strength came back to him; slowly from day to day he went finding fragments of

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his old self. He began to take interest in outside things; talked less of death and its consequences, more of life and its chances; longed for the sun, and for hours sat propped against pillows looking out upon the brooding autumn fields. He planned and schemed (just as of old); saw himself, a new man, go triumphing through the years, freeing Hillside, piling up riches, making a name. Everything should be changed. No more foolishness. No more shirking. He had found out himself; had found Jane.

Late in September, he was able to sit by the window for a while of sunshine; or by the fire of evenings, when the blinds were drawn. People came and shouted greetings from the lawn, he answering bravely; came in at night, even, stepping clumsily on tiptoe from the door, just to shake his hand and wish him well.

'Ha, Squire, me son,' would be the word. 'Glad to see ye on your pins again, so I am. Good evenin' to yourself, ma'am; an' I hope I see ye well. An' how will it be with ye now, Martin boy?' James or John would continue, head cocked inquiringly, hat on knee,

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elbows squared, himself sitting bolt, for good manners' sake, on the edge of a chair. 'Faith, an' it's bravely ye look, so ye do; an' sure it's a credit ye are to the Mistress that's nursed ye. Powerful it is to see ye sittin' there after all you've been through; an' God knows we're all as glad as if ye were our own blood. . . . Och no, now; sure I couldn't be havin' anythin'. . . . Well, well, then; just a toothful for friendship's sake. . . . Here's your good health, ma'am; an' yours, Squire boy; an' God be kind to ye both.'

Still, as they say in Gorteen, good wishes mend no bones, and surely they did little for Martin. His progress was very slow. When James came back, after a week or two, he found the Squire still in the big arm-chair; when John, turning in once more for market-day greeting, stepped across the lawn, his face fell at sight of Martin still behind the window. 'God help the boy,' said James, as he stumbled down the stairs. 'Man alive, his face haunts me,' muttered John, going slowly towards his cart. 'Patience,' said the doctor, as he pulled on his gloves, 'keep quiet and keep cheerful.' 'Patience?' cried Martin

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in his chair, his eyes greedy upon the sunshine. 'Great king, I 'm sick of patience.'

So day after day, throughout the long glory of October weather, he sat there by the window or crept about the room, each day as it went leaving him a little stronger, a little more restless and impatient. Was this never to end? Was he to be caged there, like a tame monkey, for ever and ever? . . . He was weary of the house, weary to death of physic and slops; what he needed was the open air, and the smell of the clay, and the warmth of the sun on his back. . . . Doctors knew nothing. Women were always afraid. What mortal harm could come of a stroll in the sunshine, or a smoke by the kitchen fire? He was well enough. See how firm he was on his feet, see him lift that chair head high. . . . The autumn was going, the days were drawing short, soon winter would be here and the bitter rain. . . . Look at the fields and the hills, see the leaves whirling in showers, see the mountain over there, with the sky touching it, and the fresh breeze sweeping across its back. . . . Think of all he was missing. Think of the big open world

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out there—so big, so big and fresh—and he shut away from it like a bird in a cage. It was hard. It was bitter hard. . . . Here was October gone, and November come, and to-morrow it might be snowing. Oh, by the Lord above, he must go or die! Let him out—let him out! And breaking from Jane, Martin rushed downstairs and out through the front doorway.

Bareheaded, he stood on the gravel path, face to the sky and shoulders back, drawing the air into his lungs with great deep gasps. Ah, the pleasure of it! Jane might plead and weep, Mary the servant come wailing protest, but here was heaven. Look at the fields, stretching out and away, back, back; see the hills crowding full in the big world. 'Woman, woman,' he said to Jane, 'quit worryin' me. Let me be for this one hour—this one hour.'

They brought him hat and coat, muffled and shod him; then left him with his hour. His blood ran wine. His feet were like wings bearing him along. Like one come at last upon the wonders of a new world, he drank them in greedily. Such bigness. Such freshness. Such glory of change.

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Turning, in a while, he went into the yard, there stopped again and, with Jane watching him from the kitchen window, filled himself anew. It was wondrous pleasant. Ah, the smell of good earth, the scent of fresh hay, of peat smoke, of withered leaves, the rattle of chains, the stamping of hooves, cocks crowing, calves bleating, men shouting in the valley, freshness and life everywhere in the world. Slowly, like one come from long exile back to the haunts of youth, seeing and welcoming all things, he went in and out; fondled the horses in the stable, scratched the cattle in the byre, climbed into the barn and sat upon the straw, drank buttermilk in the dairy, pulled hay from a stack in the haggard and smelt it, went through the orchard, the paddock, the garden, turned out at last into the open fields.

It was glorious there. He faced the wind and drew it in, warmed himself in the gracious autumn sunshine, strode among the rushes and the whins, leant upon gates, rested against trees, kicked at the clay till his boots were heavy. How big the world was, how full of good and pleasant things, all so friendly and fresh and quiet. The many times he had

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walked just here, never seeing or hearing, discontented, moody; the wonderful time it was now, the great pleasure that filled him full. Ah, life was good. The world was beautiful. Hillside was a garden. There it lay around him, field and hill, ditch and hedgerow, his Hillside. He pictured it free again, his very own. He wanted to lie upon it, to run across it. Only he could not run. He felt tired, dizzy. To-morrow he must come again. But to-morrow might never come. He must see more to-day, now—now. Bracing himself, he hurried on; soon finding strength on the ebb, turned reluctantly and made for home.

Jane was waiting in the yard. At sight of his face she hurried to him, took his arm and would have led him in. But he would not be led.

'No,' he said, 'not yet. Let me be, Jane. I 'll come in soon.'

'Martin, dear, you 're tired. Come, Martin. Enough 's as good as a feast. To-morrow will soon be here.'

Had she left him he would have followed her quick, but she stayed pleading, and he fell obstinate.

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'Not yet,' he repeated. 'Quit, Jane, I say.'

'But you're tired, Martin. Come with me. If ye stay it might be your death.'

'Death?' He laughed scornfully. 'I never was better. I could walk for hours. I could—' He turned abruptly, went to the stable, presently came back leading out Nancy, the chestnut mare, saddled and bridled. 'Bring me the spurs,' he shouted towards the house.

Jane stood still, breathing hard. This was the old Martin. What could she do? She heard footsteps in the avenue; looked and saw Red Hugh coming up—coming, as every day for weeks he had come, to ask for news.

'Mary,' shouted Martin, 'bring me the spurs, I say.' Then he also heard the footsteps, and saw Red Hugh. His face flushed. He leant his arms upon the saddle, crossed his feet, so stood waiting.

In a minute Hugh came into the yard. He glanced at Jane, looked steadily at Martin, and came forward with outstretched hand.

'Martin,' he said, 'I'm glad to see ye. Man, I'm very glad.'

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'I 'm obliged to you,' answered Martin with a nod. 'Last time we spoke your words were different.'

'Won't ye shake hands?' said Hugh. 'Man, this is no time for foolishness. Martin, I ask your pardon. Before God, I 'm glad to see ye well. Don't ye believe me?'

Martin stood hesitant, that feeling of animosity against Fallon strong in him. 'If I were dead he 'd be glad,' he thought. Then with a rush his better nature triumphed, and he took Hugh's hand.

'I know you 're glad, Fallon. . . . Stay here with Jane till I come back, an' we 'll have a talk together. Woa, Nancy girl, woa, lass.' He put his foot in the stirrup, and at that Jane cried to Hugh.

'Stop him, father. Stop him. He 's not fit to go. It 'll kill him, it 'll kill him.'

But already Martin was in the saddle. He gave Nancy word and heel, waved a hand to Jane, and turned for the fields.

Slowly at first, for Martin was weak, then at a canter, as Martin warmed, then at full gallop, away they went in mad career. The hedges flew past, the hills fell behind, in the

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valleys was patter of clay and thunder of flying hooves. 'Good lass,' cried Martin, crouching forward in the saddle, voice tender, hand soft on Nancy's neck; and at touch of his hand and sound of his voice, Nancy flew for love of him. 'I 've waited long for you, master,' she might have said. 'Ride me even to the death.' And he answered: 'Good lass, good lass,' and rode her as to the death.

Ah, the madness of that supreme hour. The rush of the wind, the swoop and the flight, the music of Nancy's hooves, her strength, her swiftness, the rhythm of her going, the riot in his blood, the turmoil of excitement that raged within, rose swiftly and sobbed in his throat; ah, the hour they made. He was possessed, filled with hot strength and passion. He rose in his stirrups and shouted, waved his hat and shouted again, shook loose the reins and rode as to the death. Jane and Red Hugh stood watching by the gate, silently waiting. On the hills men dropped their spades, ran to the ditches and stood wondering, crying to one another, 'The Squire 's out.'

Yes; the Squire was out. 'Good lass,' he

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cried; and Nancy flew for love of him. 'Aloo-aloo-aloo,' he shouted to the watchers on the hills; and shouted again in answer to their skirls. 'Aloo-aloo-aloo,' he cried to Jane and Red Hugh before him; and waved to them as in farewell. They were come to the Nine-acre field, sweeping straight for home. Another minute and all would be over; Jane breathing and the watchers back with their spades. Another minute and Martin . . .

He crouched forward, a hand on Nancy's neck, and whispered: 'Can we do it, lass? Steady, girl; steady.' And for answer Nancy shook herself; then stretched for the big double ditch. 'He 's mad,' said Red Hugh by the gateway. 'By the king, he 's trying it,' said they on the hills; then stooped to watch the jump. . . .

What failed them in that moment? Was it Martin? Was it Nancy? Did Martin lose strength at the last; or did Nancy break her heart for love of him; or was it fated that they should end just so, with that sickening thud?

Who knows? Who can say that it was not well?

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CHAPTER XVI

THEY buried him in Drumhill churchyard, with full honours. All the world gathered in and followed him. As he passed Leemore and Kate Trant standing there, haggard by the hedge, the last car had not left Hillside gateway. 'Good-bye, Martin,' she said; 'and God forgive me for what I've done to you. I sent you to your death —I sent you to your death,' she said; then, as woman will, turned away to hide her sorrow. 'Why was I so hard,' she said to herself, sitting lone in the rostrum. 'Had I listened I might have helped him.'

They filled the churchyard; thronged the church to hear the Rector's sermon. It was pure eulogy. Of the dead nothing but good: and a long farewell. 'His life was short,' was the Rector's tribute, 'but he filled it full. We

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all knew him; we all loved him; and now we bid him farewell, sorrowing much for what we have lost, but giving him back confidently to the God who made him.' Let the words stand; but could Martin have heard, maybe he had liked more the simpler tribute of his friends: 'A bold lad, and he died like a man.'

So Jane was left alone. Bravely she met fate; boldly faced adversity. She toiled constantly, striving night and day to keep Hillside and to set it free. People were kind. Many offered help, some offered money; but she accepted nothing. When Red Hugh came advising, she listened patiently; then continued on the way that Martin had traced. At first she did well; but seasons fell bad, there were losses in cattle and crops, her strength gave out. Gradually the toils closed upon her, driving her to the inevitable end. She persevered to the last; and when Hillside was sold, quietly took her old place in her father's house.

She is there now, working out her life in patience. She never complains, never fails

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in any duty towards God or man. Meekly she goes her way, toiling in her linsey gown, striving, praying, doing good; waiting peacefully for God to call.

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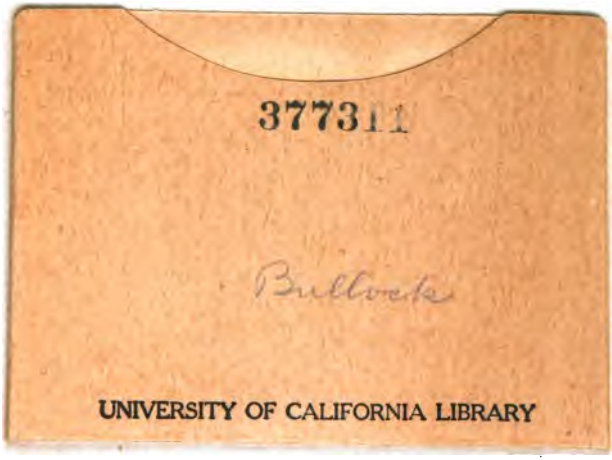
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